



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Holding Fast and Letting Go



600060876X





H O L D I N G F A S T

AND

LETTING GO.

A Fable.

BY

BRUDIE BRUDIE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

CAMBRIDGE: J. HALL & SON.

LONDON: SIMPKIN & MARSHALL;
WHITTAKER & CO.

1874.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

251. b. 238.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "FORGIVE MY GRIEF FOR ONE REMOVED" . .	I
II. "AND SHE IS GROWN SO DEAR, SO DEAR". .	12
III. "BUT LET ME HOLD MY PURPOSE TILL I DIE" .	23
IV. "SOME WORTHY DEED FOR HUMAN HAPPINESS"	38
V. "A TENDER INFANT WITH ITS CURTAIN'D EYE"	47
VI. "IN A TROUBLED SEA OF PASSION TOSS'D" .	54
VII. "FREE FROM DOUBT AND FRUITLESS SORROW" .	59
VIII. "BUT BEARS ITS BLOSSOM INTO WINTER'S CLIME".	70
IX. "NO FRIEND'S A FRIEND, TILL HE SHALL PROVE A FRIEND. * * * * "	78
X. "LOVE THAT HATH US IN THE NET" . . .	92
XI. "LOOKS, AND LONGS, AND LONGS, AND WISHES FOR ITS OPENING DAY"	103

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. "ONLY MY HEART, TO MY HEART, SHALL SHOW IT"	113
XIII. "KIND HEARTS ARE MORE THAN CORONETS".	130
XIV. "FOR, O MY GOD, THY CREATURES ARE SO FRAIL".	140
XV. "I WILL PLUCK IT FROM MY BOSOM, THO' MY HEART BE AT THE ROOT"	158
XVI. "THAT HAS TO-DAY ITS SUNNY SIDE" . . .	168
XVII. "I CANNOT SOAR INTO THE HEIGHTS YOU SHOW".	183
XVIII. "A JEALOUSY SO STRONG THAT JUDGMENT CANNOT CURE"	198
XIX. "BECAUSE THINGS SEEN ARE MIGHTIER THAN THINGS HEARD"	210
XX. "THOU LEANEST O'ER THINE INFANT'S COUCH OF PAIN".	218
XXI. "OUR PASSIONS ALWAYS FATAL COUNSELS GIVE"	224
XXII. "BUT THE SILENCE WAS UNBROKEN, AND THE STILLNESS GAVE NO TOKEN".	230
XXIII. "FAREWELL! GOD KNOWS WHEN WE SHALL MEET AGAIN"	248

HOLDING FAST AND LETTING GO.

CHAPTER I.

“Forgive my grief for one removed.”

“How late the post is to-day!” exclaimed a lady, who was sitting listlessly on a low easy chair in her boudoir, near to a bright fire, one chilly autumn morning. “Provokingly late,” she added, as, rising with a slight gesture of impatience, she consulted a watch that rested on a small carved oak table near her.

But she had no sooner touched it, when all the impatience, which she had betrayed, vanished, and her small hand lingered gently

and lovingly over it, while tears gathered slowly in her large dark eyes.

"How impatient I am," she murmured. "A child even yet," she continued, "where all that is strong and brave is necessary. Why do I not more readily learn to be good and patient, as he would have had me, but, above all, as God would have me to be?"

The hunting watch, the slender figure in its deep mourning dress, the bowed head with its white covering partially concealing the bright chestnut-coloured hair, together with the pale sad face—all these conveyed the fact, that sorrows, of which widowhood is the "crown," are reigning over her. Caressingly she lifted the watch from its ivory stand, and while gazing silently and sorrowfully upon it, the sound of approaching footsteps reached her ear. She then replaced it, and, with a low, clear voice, replied to the knock that was heard at her door, with a permission for the visitor to enter.

Violet Vivien's eyes brightened as she perceived Major Harcourt, and acknowledged his salutation.

"I have ventured to bring your letters to you myself, Mrs. Vivien," he began, after the first inquiries for her health had passed. "I feared so much that there might be some troublesome business documents among them, and, therefore, having taken the bag from your maid, whom I met in the hall, I have brought it in at once, that you might not encounter its contents alone. I'm very sorry," he further added, "that I am obliged to leave this morning, as I have business in town to-day, and must show myself early at head-quarters to-morrow."

"Let us see whether we have anything very formidable here," returned Violet, as she unlocked the bag, and commenced a rapid survey of its contents.

More than once, as she removed the packets, an ominous rustling of the paper

told of trembling fingers, while an expression as of sharp pain passed over her fair countenance.

Major Harcourt watched her intently. He guessed, and rightly so, that these outward tokens but faintly suggested the thrill of agony which passed through her widowed heart. Some of those mute missives still continued to bear the name of her late husband, who was now removed so far from the reach of their tidings, whether of weal or woe, so far away from earth, so far away from her.

Fair women and brave men are, and have been, sung in song and told in story over and over again.

Young men and maidens rise up to listen, while, hereafter, their own lives form histories for others, grand or simple, as the case may be, pleasing or otherwise.

They cannot live and leave no life-track behind them.

Who does not love the good, the true, the brave, and the beautiful? Who does not shudder at their contrasts? Who is not often perplexed by their anomalies?

We gaze upon fair faces, and wonder whether the hearts of their owners are as bright and unstained as the gay smiles which wreath them, and as the spotless hues of lily and rose which adorn them.

We look upon brave men, and again we wonder—are mind and will as strong, in the “might of their love,” for all things holy and pure, as in deeds of valour, personal courage, and prowess?

We have a fair woman and a brave man before us now.

They are standing side by side. Near to one another as we reckon space, but widely separated in thought.

Of Violet Vivien we have already told somewhat.

She was a widow, young, gentle, and with

little or no knowledge of the world and the darkness of its intricate paths.

There had been naught in her life, either to mar the heart-whole truthfulness and girlish simplicity which was portrayed in every line of her expressive face, or to dim its brightness, save only the pensiveness which had been shed over it by the grief of a sacred sorrow.

But of Lionel Harcourt, he who is so earnestly studying every quiver of her slight frame, and each passing emotion as it sweeps across her sweet countenance, let us take a closer scrutiny.

There is not only a hard, but almost fierce determination around the well-formed mouth, which [the thick, handsome moustache does not hide. Moreover, there is an intensity in his prolonged and earnest gaze, which augurs ill for foe, if indeed well for friend.

Resolution and persistency of purpose speak out clearly from all his features, as well

as from the erect bearing and immovable rigidity of his present position.

Not a muscle stirred as he continued looking fixedly upon Violet, who remained too much absorbed in her employment to notice the concentrated attention of her companion.

His bronzed cheek told of many days spent in other climes under more scorching suns than ours, while one deep scar, across his broad forehead, suggested deeds and scenes of battle-fields.

But over the inner battle—the battle of heart and soul in the campaign of life—the sternly-compressed face has drawn a veil, and something akin to distrust of him, and fear for Violet, steals over us.

It was a still autumn morning, and as we have before observed, a chilly one. A few faded leaves fell lazily and slowly from their summer thrones, unwilling, it would seem, to abdicate and exchange their lofty-

ness for the damp grass and earth beneath them.

Autumn roses were even yet climbing and blooming in rich clustering profusion. Their and dainty blossoms of white and pink, crimson yellow, shed forth their loveliness and sweet perfume with such bounteousness and prodigality, as though in haste to exhibit their full beauty ere the rude blast of winter should overtake, scatter, and destroy them.

Now and then the sound of a distant shot rang out, telling that the hand of the sportsman was at work. But it came muffled by the heavy atmosphere, as well as by the distance.

Nothing from the outer world disturbed the occupation of Violet, or arrested the contemplation of Lionel Harcourt.

The silence in the room remained unbroken for some minutes.

At length Mrs. Vivien raised her head and said,

"I need not bore you this morning, Major Harcourt, with any of these troublesome despatches. Some are simple enough for me to manage by myself, and, as I expect Captain Wyldish will be with us at dinner to-day, the others can wait until he arrives." Then, observing the cloud which her words appeared to have raised to his brow, she added, quickly, "My gratitude is yours, very warmly, for your kind offer of help, but I must begin now to be less troublesome to my friends generally, and also learn how to be a very brave, clever, and business-like little woman."

She spoke lightly, as though trying, by a courageous semblance of mirth, to illustrate one of the virtues which she had just enumerated, while the faint shadow of an arch smile played over her face, from which, alas, it had long been banished by sorrow. The smile disappeared, however, before Lionel Harcourt could reply.

•

"Captain Wyldish must indeed be proud of the confidence reposed in him. Indeed, I congratulate, and at the same time I confess that I envy, him."

"You need not envy him," returned Violet, simply, "for I am dull of comprehension, and therefore troublesome beyond belief."

Then putting aside her papers, she turned kindly towards him. and with womanly forethought spoke of his coming journey, and his arrangements for it.

Major Harcourt lingered near her until the announcement that his carriage was at the door told him that the inevitable moment of departure had arrived.

A few expressions of mutual friendliness were exchanged, and then they parted, as calmly as two people must part when the agony of the parting rests with one heart only.

Violet stood in the deep recess of her

window, watching the carriage until it had disappeared, and then springing across the room, she drew back a thick velvet curtain, which concealed a second door in the apartment. Opening the door softly, she passed through it.

CHAPTER II.

“And she is grown so dear, so dear.”

VIOLET and her husband lived in one of the most picturesque parts of ——shire. A few months after Arundel had left the University he, for the second time, met Violet; and seeing in her sweet youthful face that which

“—to look at was to love,”

at the end of the same year he had not only gained her affection, but made her his wife. .

The circumstances of their first meeting had been of a somewhat romantic character. During his second long vacation a friend

tempted him to journey into North Wales. To Arundel Vivien, so fully alive as he was to the beauties of nature, this visit afforded much pleasure. He had travelled much, as his sketch-book testified, but he had never before explored that comparatively speaking home-scenery. The blue mountains, the foaming torrents rushing from their sides, with the Welsh villages studded at their bases, delighted his artist's eye.

Time sped rapidly, and the last day of his sojourn had arrived. The sun was shining in all its splendour, and he, braving the heat of its rays, had wandered to a spot which he much admired. While diligently engaged in putting the final strokes upon the paper whereon he had skilfully delineated the beautiful scenery before him, the clattering of a horse's hoofs rose above the noise of the rapid river which was splashing around him.

He leapt from the gray boulder, which formed his seat, and hastened to make for the

road above, from whence the sound had proceeded.

Almost before he had secured his footing the portentous noise ceased. To his experienced ear this sudden cessation of sound suggested danger. He scrambled, therefore, with increased alarm, up the precipitous, fern-clad, thickly-vegetated bank, upon the summit of which wound the road. Pushing aside the branches of a tree, which formed the last barrier to his ascent, he rushed forward, and became spell-bound by the sight which revealed itself.

Not many yards from where he emerged, there stood a somewhat small thoroughbred mare, trembling in every limb, while a young girl, apparently about seventeen years of age, with anxious face and coaxing voice, was kneeling by its side, and carefully passing her hands down one of its fore-legs, as if to assure herself that it had sustained no injury. The disturbed state of the road and

the soiled habit clearly showed that both rider and animal had fallen ; but the terror of the accident did not appear to have extended itself to both.

Arundel Vivien, however, at once proceeded to offer assistance, the result of which proved infinitely more disastrous to himself in its after-effects than the fall had been to the fair equestrian. She formed a very lovely picture as she blushinglly thanked him for his proffered aid, while at the same time she interspersed her thanks with gentle soothing terms to her excited steed.

The account of the accident was speedily given, and her terrified groom, with much more rapidity than Arundel desired, came in sight. To re-mount his young mistress, and to inform Arundel that it was the daughter of Sir Frederick Nashton, to whom he had offered his assistance, occupied an equally short space of time. Again Arundel Vivien was alone. But the fascination of his former

employment had lost its charms ; for that day his drawing was not resumed, but, nevertheless, his pencil was not destined to be idle.

Mingled with sketches of mountain pass, of waterfalls and woods, there was one, of which hereafter there were many copies, of a winding road, a horse, and kneeling maiden. It formed the subject of many a reverie, and the image of Violet dwelt very constantly in his imagination during the remainder of his college career.

There is much in every-day life to make one believe that the saying "marriages are made in heaven," is not wholly unworthy of faith.

It so happened that the death of Sir Frederick Nashton occurred shortly after this meeting, whereupon Arundel succeeded in ascertaining that Miss Nashton had taken up her residence in Devonshire, with a lady who had for several years supplied the place of a mother to the motherless girl.

His college course being ended, it was no

Herculean task for him, rich and enamoured as he was, an orphan, too, of good family, and moreover with full liberty to act for himself, to gain the introduction which he so ardently desired. In this matter fortune favoured him. During his residence at the University there were several sons of Devonshire families also keeping terms. It was to one of these that he was indebted for the gratification of his cherished desire—that of becoming acquainted with Violet.

Their marriage speedily followed, and Arundel Vivien soon found his young light-hearted wife to be the centre of the society in which they moved. As he guarded her, and removed all care from her path, he felt that the dream of his manhood was fulfilled, and that in all things his wife had

“—but fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life.”

It was at one of the entertainments which were frequently given in the neighbourhood

that Lionel Harcourt first met Violet Vivien. She was then very bright and winning in her happiness, having no suspicion of sorrow to dim her sparkling animation, no distrust of others, none of herself. Strong in the possession of the devotion of her husband, and seeing in his every action all that was noble and good, how could she dream of the evil which surrounded her, or how could she guess what fierce and evil passions may be sometimes concealed by the most polished and refined exterior?

Wealth and luxury had summoned sweet music, costly flowers, and rare beauty to the scene of festivity, but yet until Violet entered, nothing had proved powerful enough to arouse the fastidious attention of Lionel Harcourt, who, leaning listlessly against a doorway, was watching the successive arrivals.

A light ringing laugh fell suddenly upon his ear. Turning round, he saw a lady

smiling as she replied to a young, fair, and very good-looking man, who was eagerly asking her to dance. Again he heard her light happy voice, as, leaving the side of the gentleman upon whose arm she had been leaning, she proceeded to join the dancers.

Major Harcourt watched her for some minutes in a dreamy sort of manner, when, turning abruptly to a friend, who like himself was idly looking on, he asked,

“Who is that tall, graceful girl who is dancing so well with that big fellow, Wyldish?”

“Mrs. Vivien,” was the prompt reply; “and,” continued the speaker, “I can introduce you to her, if you like. I know her quite well. She is perfectly charming, and I advise you to be thankful for your sick leave, since it has been the means of bringing you to England, and giving you this opportunity of making her acquaintance. Her husband is one of the best fellows in the world. More-

over, he is an old college chum of mine. By-the-way, you may think yourself lucky if you get a dance, for she doesn't often patronize strangers. The women and disappointed ones say that she is not over-scrupulous about sticking to her engagements. However, 'faint heart never won fair lady,' you know, &c., &c., and for doing you this service, I shall expect you to become my sworn ally for the rest of the term of your natural life."

The speaker crossed the ball-room, accompanied by Lionel Harcourt, who, after a few words of introduction, encountered, for the first time, the full, earnest gaze of Violet Vivien.

The ill-omened prophecy of his friend proved to be but too true. Violet had no dance to give him. Before he had time to realize his disappointment, the unwelcome fiat had been spoken, and, with a slight bow, she had passed from him.

It is always provoking to a man at a

crowded ball, and particularly to one who had gone through so many seasons as Lionel Harcourt, to find himself hopelessly enchanted with an unknown and especial piece of loveliness, and doubly so, after taking an infinity of pains to gain an introduction, and perchance long waiting, to receive only a cold bow, with the faintest possible shadow of a smile, accompanied by the assertion that her card is "full—quite full."

But it is even yet more provoking when the sweet enslaver, who has proved so irresistible, gives a glance of relief at the fortunate man, who, in all probability, may be holding her bouquet, with the triumphant assurance in his heart that all such petitions would be in vain, and with whom she smilingly resumes either the dance or their conversation.

Luckily the pang is not often of long duration.

A rapid dance with some less fatally fair

one, or a lounge in the refreshment-room with a chosen friend, dispels the cloud, and the baffled individual takes out his programme and looks keenly around for fresh excitement.

Such philosophy, however, is not invariable.

Cupid's shaft sometimes strikes home, and makes a wound so deep that other passions besides love are thereby roused.

It was thus with Lionel Harcourt.

As the bold bright face of Stanley Wyldish bent towards Mrs. Vivien, there mingled swiftly with his admiration for her, the beginning of that unreasonable hatred towards Stanley Wyldish, the bitterness of which grew more and more intense as time wore on.

It rose like a wild wind from an unexpected quarter, and its fury gathered strength from succeeding events.

CHAPTER III.

"But let me hold my purpose till I die."

A FEW weeks before the preceding events, Violet Vivien and Stanley Wyldish were enjoying the bright sunshine of an afternoon in June, from the heat of which they were shaded by the wide-spreading boughs of a magnificent chestnut-tree. A Skye-terrier, with its large bright eyes almost covered by the long silky hair hanging over them, was lying at their feet, and giving vent, every now and then, to a series of snaps and short growls, at the sound of some distant footstep.

"I would give you some sugar, Bon-bon,"

exclaimed Stanley Wyldish, "if I thought you would not spoil my best boots with your teeth, in my attempt to walk past you to the table. Notwithstanding your name, of all naughty little dogs, you, certainly, are the naughtiest."

"Love me—love my dog," Violet responded merrily, "and if Bon-bon is naughty to all the world, he is always good and faithful to me. I hate everything that is popular—popular men, popular women, popular preachers, popular places, popular dogs, popular anything—and as Bon-bon decidedly does not go in for popularity, I like him accordingly. We love each other wonderfully, little doggie, do we not?" she continued, considerably out of breath, in her eagerness. "But as you are leaving us soon, Mr. Wyldish, I must not quarrel with you about Bon-bon, and especially as I am extremely elated at having succeeded, after so many defeats, in beating you at croquet. I

have serious thoughts, after such an achievement, of trying for the All-England prize. Really it is almost professional of you to play so provokingly well, and, amongst the rest of my valuable advice, I shall suggest that you turn *croquetist*, or whatever a professor of the noble art would be termed. It might be lucrative, and you are always hard up in the army——”

“Chaff me,” returned Stanley Wyldish, “as much as you like, Mrs. Vivien, on other subjects, but do not chaff me about your advice. You don’t know,” he continued earnestly, “how I prize it and how I remember it when I am away. It has made a different man of me, and my old chums say they hardly know me in my reformed character.”

“Reformed!” echoed Violet lightly. “Were you ever in need of reformation? I should have prescribed a much more severe discipline, had I known it. I should have——”

But what the prescription would have been never transpired to edify her listener, for a low growl from Bon-bon warned them that visitors were approaching. Looking up, they saw two gentlemen crossing the lawn and coming towards them.

Afternoon tea is, of all institutions, one of the most delightful of the age in which we live, and Violet so approved of it, that she used often to declare laughingly, "I believe we begin tea directly luncheon is over, and go steadily on until the dressing bell rings."

An afternoon tea under Violet's chestnut-tree was truly a pleasant affair. To look at the tree made one happy, as its beautiful branches, dipping right down to the grass, formed a most deliciously cool shade. Then there were the soft rugs and cushions of bright colours arranged about the stem, and when you were lowly but luxuriously seated upon one of these, you might behold

the gaily-blossomed flower-garden, of which the wind kindly gave glimpses, as it gently stirred leaf and branch.

Again there was the low tea-table, with its fairy-like cups and saucers, and rare old silver, so perfect in all their details, that you marvelled at them, and at all else, and, indeed, would have gone on marvelling, but that the voice of the hostess recalled you to yourself, as with her delicate hands she prepared the practical result of this array of silver and china. Then all marvel turned instantly and naturally upon the sweet hostess herself.

Although charming in appearance, and so daintily attired, Violet Vivien was not, however, beautiful. Those who loved her, nevertheless, thought her to be so, while those who did not, were forced to confess to the power of her grace and fascination. Her afternoon teas were of long duration, and they were very numerous who strove to be

admitted to them. Once there, it was difficult for flesh and blood, and especially for masculine flesh and blood, to find courage to break through the spell of their enchantments, and face again the stern realities of the outer world.

On the present occasion, the two arrivals were politely welcomed by Mrs. Vivien.

"You are the luckiest fellow I know, Wyldish," said one of them, after they had been conversing together for a short time : "you get more leave than any fellow in the service. I should like to know how you manage it."

"By perpetually sending in and asking for it," answered Stanley Wyldish, laughingly, "whether I actually want it or not. I have been obliged to be present at the weddings of such a perfect colony of sisters, and to assist at the funerals of so many illustrious relatives, that I verily believe our colonel thinks that I am closely allied to Brigham Young, and

that all the people at the Salt Lake are my blood relations."

"So much indulgence is not good for him, is it, Captain Lonsdale?" asked Violet, "and really I do hope our little Queen, I mean Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, has not in her service many officers with such civilian dispositions, and tastes, as Mr. Wyldish."

"You are hard on me again," was his rejoinder, spoken in an undertone; and then he added aloud, "I trust you and Vivien will be persuaded to go to the ball, on the 12th of next month, that I heard Lonsdale speaking of just now. I have been told that it will be an uncommonly good one, and I mean to depend upon the luck which he imputes to me, and to hope for more leave. Will you be bored with me again so soon, Mrs. Vivien, if the fates prove propitious, and allow me to join your party?"

"I am by no means certain that we shall

go," she replied. " Even if we do, I doubt whether I ought to accede to your request, after my small attempt just now to teach you something of your duty to your Queen and country. Since I have the reputation, however, for supplying my various hostesses with dancing bachelors, who are often scarce in this part of the world, for this once I shall be condescending enough, or selfish enough, to grant it."

He acknowledged her concession with a smile and bow of thanks, as she rose to shake hands with her guests, who were departing.

Stanley Wyldish did not overrate the amount of good fortune which his luck, or frequent importunities, brought him.

The twelfth day of the succeeding month found him again at Greyford Hall.

Not many hours after his arrival, he, with Violet and her husband, proceeded to the ball.

Lionel Harcourt was also present, and it was on that night that he for the first time saw both Violet Vivien and Stanley Wyldish.

Towards the close of the entertainment, Arundel Vivien left his wife to the care of his friend Wyldish, while he endeavoured to ascertain how soon they might reasonably hope to obtain their carriage.

Too tired to continue her dancing, Violet had seated herself on an ottoman in the corner of a room which led into an impromptu conservatory.

"How good it is of you and Vivien," exclaimed her companion, suddenly changing the topic of their conversation, "to let me come to you so often. I often fear that my continued visits must be an awful nuisance to you both. I am a bad hand at expressing my thanks and gratitude, but you cannot tell what pleasure and refreshment these visits afford me, as contrasted with my life at those abomi-

nable barracks. I believe that I hate the army and everything connected with it more and more every day."

Mrs. Vivien said a few words of exposition, to which he listened gravely, and when she had finished speaking, he replied,

"You are very good, thus to try to reconcile me to that which I suppose is my calling, but I am an incorrigible grumbler upon this point. I will, however, endeavour to remember what you have pointed out to me, and to reconcile myself with a better grace even to the dismally stale jokes of our wearisome mess."

"Since you are so docile a pupil," was the rejoinder, "I shall continue my teaching with the admonition, that the excitement of gambling must not be resorted to, as an antidote, after such an effort of self-denial as you have just described."

The words were uttered playfully, and yet

with a slight amount of hesitation, as though the fair speaker feared she had ventured too far.

A slight start from the person whom she had addressed would have been noticed by Violet, had she not, for the moment, averted her eyes from him, and engaged herself in rendering more secure the fastening of one of her ornaments.

But there was no mistaking the genuine earnestness of the accents of the voice which fell upon her ear, as Stanley Wyldish, with a manner peculiarly his own, and in all manliness and frankness, said,

"May God bless you for this, Mrs. Vivien. You have set me a task, and no mean one either, to the fulfilment of which I pledge my promise. I will perform it, or, failing to do so, forfeit the pleasure of looking upon your face again."

"Do not speak thus," she interposed, gently. "Give me your simple promise only ;

I need nothing more. Promises, you know, are very sacred, and cannot be broken without causing woe to the traitor who breaks them, and therefore," she repeated in tones almost as deep and earnest as his own, "give me your simple promise, Mr. Wyldish, I need nothing more."

A bright expression of pleasure and gratitude beamed from his handsome eyes, as, with an air of extreme deference, he murmured, "My promise is now and for ever yours, Mrs. Vivien, that I will entirely forsake that which has, more than once, nearly been my ruin."

No more words were spoken on the subject.

Violet knew him perfectly well, and consequently she understood his keen appreciation of her interest, which so closely concerned his own welfare. Shortly afterwards they were rejoined by her husband, and before long they had quitted the scene of festivity.

There was barely time to finish breakfast the next morning before Stanley Wyldish had to take his departure.

Violet and Arundel accompanied him to the doorway, where they remained laughing heartily at the infinity of packages, without which it seemed impossible for him to travel, and at the numerous attempts of his servant to stow them away in the dog-cart in such a manner as to leave for himself a fragment of foot-board upon which to rest the tips of his toes. So small, however, was the space left, after all was completed, that it must have been a Blondin-like achievement to have preserved his seat, to say nothing of the decorum of his faultless attitude, as he was whirled along.

"Good-bye, old fellow; come again as soon as you like," said Arundel Vivien heartily.

"Good-bye," added the sweet voice of his wife; "we shall be always glad to see you."

Then, noticing the unusually grave expression of his face, she continued significantly, "You will not forget what you gave me last night?"

"May God forgive me, if I do," came, mingled with his farewell. Then, grasping the reins, and springing to his seat, he was quickly out of sight.

The request of Violet had been made by chance, if there is such a thing as chance in this world of ours.

She had gathered intuitively that gambling was a snare to Stanley Wyldish, and, moreover, that it was a well-loved one.

Guided by this, rather than by any real knowledge of his pursuits, she had expressed the desire which had ended in so solemn a compact between them.

A compact, the keeping of which, he said in a letter which reached her a few days after his departure, "must hold fast their friendship for ever."

Thus wrote Stanley Wyldish, from the midst of his soldier home, and so read Arundel and Violet Vivien.

As they read, so they believed.

CHAPTER IV.

"Some worthy deed for human happiness."

THE slight introduction which took place at the ball, between Violet Vivien and Lionel Harcourt, was soon afterwards ripened into intimacy by one of those tragedies which sometimes occur and startle us from the fancied security of our every-day lives.

Greyford Hall, the home of Arundel and Violet Vivien, was a large old-fashioned house, with no quaint gables, mullioned windows, or overhanging eaves to make it picturesque.

Nevertheless, its wide entrance, its long low windows and two projecting sides con-

veyed such an idea of space and comfort that it generally elicited an exclamation of delight from the beholder. Its approach, from either side of the park, afforded many fine views of the surrounding landscape.

A large cedar tree stood on one side of the house, and closed verandahs, artistically composed of wood and glass, ran along the other. The verandahs led into the drawing-room, and their atmosphere was so tempered that they formed an agreeable resort, at all seasons of the year, to those who were staying at the Hall.

From them, as far as the eye could distinguish anything, there stretched out the broad park-land studded with trees of various kinds. The ground sloped gently to the edge of a wood, in the midst of which a small lake was situated.

Upon this piece of water, Arundel Vivien had placed a boat, which he allowed his bailiff to lend to any of the tenantry, who

were sufficiently approved of to be so indulged.

Not long after the ball to which we have more than once referred, Lionel Harcourt was again staying in the neighbourhood.

Having heard much of the beauty of the lake, he determined upon taking the first opportunity of visiting it. The freedom, which a thoroughly well-bred and agreeable host and hostess place at the disposal of their guests, soon enabled him to follow the bent of his inclination, and make a solitary pilgrimage thither.

Accordingly he was one day sauntering leisurely along a narrow footpath, which skirted the wood, when he was suddenly startled by the sound of piercing shrieks. Quickening his footsteps, and leaving the path to push his way through brier and bramble, he arrived at the border of the lake, just in time to see a man struggling in the water, with one hand holding high above it a

little child. Almost stunned by the suddenness of the scene, and bewildered by the unceasing screams of a woman and two children, who were the remaining occupants of the boat, his presence of mind nevertheless did not desert him.

To run swiftly round to the place where seemed to be the narrowest part of the lake, so far as he had time to conjecture, and where the man, apparently exhausted by his frantic endeavours to save the child, had disappeared, and to plunge in after him, was the work of a very few moments.

Before any one had time to arrive, he had succeeded in bringing the man to bank.

By this time, the continued lamentations of the woman and children had aroused the attention of some labourers who were at work in an adjoining field. The terrible news spread quickly from mouth to mouth, and in an incredibly short space of time the villagers had flocked around, and with hearty good-will

were anxiously striving to give all the assistance in their power.

Under the directions of Lionel Harcourt, many stalwart sons of toil were soon engaged in trying to recover the body of the child.

Arundel Vivien was returning home from a ride, when he met the sad cavalcade bearing the still inanimate body of the poor man to the nearest cottage.

Having rapidly suggested means to be used for his resuscitation, and having procured medical assistance, he rode hastily to the scene of the accident.

How changed was the aspect of this secluded spot!

Hurrying feet were heedlessly trampling down the fair wild flowers and feathery ferns—hoarse voices were crying eagerly for ropes and appliances to manufacture an impromptu drag—women with tearful eyes were striving to hush the cries of the surviving little ones,

and did not dare to take them to the home of their sick mother, until they knew whether life could be restored to the father and husband. Arundel Vivien immediately gave permission for them to be conveyed to the Hall, with the poor woman who accompanied them, whose blanched face and wandering eye showed how necessary it was that she should also be attended to. Then he also joined the party of divers who were still seeking for the body of the child. After a search of nearly an hour, it was discovered a few yards only from where the powerless hand of its father had been forced to relinquish its grasp. There could be no hope of life, and the little body was carried with silent reverence to the village inn. Until then Arundel Vivien had not noticed that a stranger was standing amongst them. Suddenly he perceived Lionel Harcourt, who by this time had become completely exhausted. Accosting him, he warmly invited him to return and pass the night at Greyford

Hall. This invitation was gladly accepted. Despatching a messenger for his servant and toilette requirements, with an explanation to his entertainers, he accompanied Arundel Vivien to his home. It was late when he entered the drawing-room before dinner, but notwithstanding, Mrs. Vivien was not yet there. She had been much frightened and distressed by the sad catastrophe, and until assured that the sufferer was in a fair way of recovery, and that his sick wife had received the tidings of the death of her child with more calmness and less danger to her enfeebled condition than could have been expected, she had been unable to compose herself sufficiently to submit to the necessary preparations for dinner.

Lionel Harcourt waited with great impatience for her appearance, and as she entered the room, he knew at once there was no disappointment in store for him. Dressed in rich white silk, elaborately

trimmed with fine old lace, and with deeply tinted hothouse flowers tastefully arranged in her hair, her large eyes dilated, and her cheeks somewhat flushed with the excitement and agitation which she had undergone, she was looking more than usually bewitching. Graceful at all times, she was more conspicuously so in doing the honours of her husband's house, and, as she greeted him with an assurance of welcome, Lionel Harcourt felt almost tempted to rejoice at the melancholy cause which had brought him thus unexpectedly there.

The party at dinner was completed by Mr. Matingley, the rector. The conversation turned naturally upon the tragical event of the afternoon.

Having mixed almost exclusively with the fashionable world, and been accustomed to the frivolous and often vapid surface-talk of fashionable men and women, Lionel Harcourt was much struck by the tone of deep feeling

with which his companions eagerly brought forward schemes for the relief of the suffering family, as also by the information displayed by both pastor and host upon all topics. At the same time he was much interested by the earnestness of Violet's remarks, in conjunction with her piquancy and brilliancy, when lighter matters were touched upon.

But all things come to an end—happily enough for the unpleasant occurrences of life, but unhappily for the pleasant. Violet retired early from the dinner table, and the short evening passed rapidly away. But it formed nevertheless another link in a chain of feelings and circumstances which swiftly grew into fetters of such strength and magnitude, that none could tell who might break them.

CHAPTER V.

"A tender infant with its curtain'd eye."

AFTER this digression let us return to the beginning of our story.

The door by which Violet left her boudoir led into an ante-room adjoining her own sleeping apartment. She gently entered the former, and moving noiselessly forward, paused before a tiny bed, upon which nestled amid soft white pillows her little May.

The bright golden hair, in all the disorder of slumber, curled over the head of the sleeping child, and her bare dimpled baby arms rested lightly on the eider-down quilt which covered her.

Violet laid her cheek tenderly against that of the round rosy one of her babe ; and as she did so, the holy light of a mother's love stole over the delicate hue of her own.

May Vivien was at this time almost a year old. No father's proud kiss had welcomed, or ever fallen upon her.

Three months before her birth, typhoid fever had prevailed around Greyford Hall. To the effects of this disease, after a short illness, the life of Arundel had yielded itself.

The greatest fears were also entertained for Violet, but that which had ruthlessly devastated her happiness stayed its course, and left her untouched.

When the little May was born, anxious tenantry thronged the park to gather tidings of the fact.

But all was hushed and quiet. No glad-some bells rang out the welcome news, lest in their floating peal of joy there should sound a

funeral knell in the ear of the gentle lady of the Hall.

Violet slowly recovered her strength, and upon her child she concentrated all the strong pure love which she had given to her husband.

“Not all alone, now, my darling. Not all alone,” were her first words to her newly-born infant—“not all alone, my darling, for we can talk to each other of papa, and of the heaven which is now papa’s home.”

And so day after day, and week after week, this tiny blossom cast its sweetness around poor Violet’s drooping heart, and shed its little light of comfort, with

“Baby fingers, waxen touches,—”

over moments, which otherwise she would have deemed too sorrowful to be endured. Her greatest pleasure was to carry the wee May round and round the study, which had been the favourite resort of Arundel, and to

whisper to her long tales which told of all his goodness.

Her greatest care, too, was to preserve, untouched and unmoved, the old familiar objects which he had loved, that so his little May might see them all as he had left them. Moreover, that, as she grew, she might learn to know his chair, his books, his favourite horse, and the faithful dog which had rarely left him.

These and many other hopes were breathed in broken murmurs to the little one, as, through the long long night, it lay with its little head so close above the mother's heart, and with the weight of its tiny form seemed to press from her bosom some of the sorrow, which had threatened to crush out her young life.

But over the clouded existence of Violet there came sometimes suffering so sharp, that not even the sweet influence of her babe could wean her from the train of sorrowful

memories, which would arise unbidden, with overwhelming force and freshness.

The monotonous note of the cuckoo; the happy hum of bees, and the busy twittering of swallows, together with the flight of a softly-coloured gossamer-textured moth, or a gorgeously clothed dragon-fly, would suddenly unloose the flood-gate of her misery, and recall to her mind those happier days, and that home life of which she had been the centre.

The agony of sorrow being thus aroused, retrospection placed many a picture of golden hours before her. It not only reminded her of happy searchings for the moss-hidden violet, the dappled orchis, and other bright wild-flowers, but it told her of lengthened rides, and of the dream-like splash of oars, as they moved in the clear rippling water.

She experienced its sadness in the soft balm of spring-tide air, and in the warmth and glow of the sunshine of later months.

She felt its bitterness, too, in the calm twilight of autumn evenings, and she shivered beneath it when winter spread his snowy veil over leafless branch and thatched roof.

Almost every incident had its own peculiar halo of sadness to her. However trifling in itself the circumstance might be to an ordinary observer, it had a secret spell for her, which, calling back the past, found an ever-ready echo in her spirit.

Through every scene the image of her husband dwelt with her. He, whose love had never failed her, and by whom her happiness had been made happier, her sadness less sad.

As her brimming cup of grief overflowed, she would often relinquish her baby to the charge of others, and implore to be left alone. But not alone—even then—since there is One Who speaketh peace to the widowed heart, and Who will not suffer His lonely ones to faint utterly.

This morning Violet watched the slumbers of her child for some time, almost wishing to awake her, so intensely did she desire her innocent companionship. But, remembering that it was growing late, she again kissed her little May, and then went in search of Miss Summerleigh, the friend who was an inmate of her house, and who, for the present, guided the domestic reins for her.

CHAPTER VI.

"In a troubled sea of passion toss'd."

IN the meantime let us follow Lionel Harcourt on his way.

"Curse the fellow," he muttered between his clenched teeth, "but for him and his interference, Mrs. Vivien would not so readily have rejected my offer of assistance." He paused, and then continued, savagely, "Ten thousand curses on him. As he thus gave expression to some of his anger, he remembered, with a too vivid distinctness, the genial face and kindly voice of the man whom he hated, while he could not forget that Arundel Vivien had so deemed Stanley Wyldish his

greatest friend, that he had sent for him to be with him during his last days upon earth, and that he had passed away in the full assurance that, so long as she lived, there would be one strong arm to protect in all pure friendliness his helpless little wife. Moreover, Lionel Harcourt knew that Stanley Wyldish had been true to this trust, and that he had, with unsparing pains and utmost thoughtfulness, arranged all things for Violet and her child. This knowledge added fuel to the fire of his wrath.

In truth, the devotion of Stanley Wyldish to the settlement of the affairs of his departed friend had been untiring.

Arundel Vivien had spent the years of his childhood with, and was brought up by, the parents of Stanley Wyldish. There was a difference of a few years only between the ages of Arundel and Stanley, and less they had always shown a warm affection for each other. Previously to the marriage

of Arundel and Violet the two young men had, to a certain extent, lost sight of each other; but Stanley Wyldish, on his return to England, after a short period of foreign service, quickly sought out his old friend and companion, and from that time he became a frequent visitor at Greyford Hall. The few intervening years had brought changes to each.

Arundel had settled down with his wife, and was quietly and happily carving out for himself high and noble deeds in

"The trivial round, the common 'task,'"

while the scenes of what Stanley Wyldish termed his own "chequered career," had been of a widely different character.

To Stanley Wyldish the life at Greyford Hall revealed new desires, from which a dim perception had gradually dawned of a greater and fuller existence than had hitherto been his.

Possessing that pre-eminence in muscular strength which all men admire and covet, and excelling in manly sports and exercises of every description, in conjunction with high spirits, a warm heart, and a generous disposition, he had drifted thus far pleasantly through life, wishing for nothing more than the world was readily disposed to award to the owner of such advantages.

Lionel Harcourt, in spite of his invectives, comprehended that Violet rightly turned to Stanley Wyldish in her difficulties. Her husband had arranged that so it should be. The brotherly intimacy which had ripened with their years warranted this trust. No one could so well understand every particular of his affairs as he whom Arundel Vivien had known and loved from boyhood, and with whom his life from infancy, with the exception of a few years, had been passed.

All this, and a great deal more, passed

through the mind of Lionel Harcourt, but the longer he pondered over the circumstances, the heartier was the cordiality with which he hated Stanley Wyldish.

“There may be trials yet in store for Mrs. Vivien, from which I alone can extricate her,” was the concluding thought of his soliloquy, regardless of the sorrow to which it unavoidably pointed.

CHAPTER VII.

“Free from doubt and faithless sorrow.”

WE left Violet going in search of her friend, Miss Summerleigh, whom she found in the drawing-room, arranging some flowers which had been brought to her by the gardener.

Dorothy Summerleigh was a sweet, lovable-looking woman. She was short, plump, and cosey-looking, with a clear, fresh complexion and glossy brown hair. No one ever paused to ask her age. No one ever even thought about it, so completely did her extreme unselfishness make her congenial to the interests and feelings of all around her.

Violet, like her husband, was an orphan, and like him, too, she had neither brother nor sister.

Dorothy Summerleigh, therefore, had taken charge of her from the time of the decease of her father, Sir Frederick Nashton, until she became the happy mistress of Greyford Hall.

From that time the visits of Dorothy to the Hall had proved to be a genuine pleasure, both to its owners and to herself.

But when the heavy cloud of affliction, which hung over the peaceful household, had burst with such terrible violence over the gentle head of Violet, Dorothy Summerleigh came to her as quickly as possible, having resigned her pretty home in North Devonshire to the care of her servants. She had, as yet, never left the mourner to her loneliness, but had watched over her, and soothed her through the various phases which sharp suffering invariably assumes on a nature of fervent impulses, and deep earnest feeling.

She always breakfasted alone, unless other guests were in the house to share her solitary meal. After the birth of little May, Violet, scarcely knowing why, had never resumed her place at the breakfast table. But her friend, who was mindful of her tearful glances, which would so touchingly rest on the empty place opposite, and of the trembling hand which had so often been raised, to try, with its little palm, to hide her sorrowful face, had arranged that, until her perfect recovery, breakfast should be served for her in her own boudoir.

There, through the open door which led to her bedroom, she could watch her baby, May, either sleeping, or being carried to and fro by her faithful nurse Susanne. It was the custom of Violet to remain there until the letter-bag arrived, when she would sally forth to impart whatever news it contained to Dorothy Summerleigh, and to receive from her the various domestic details of her

large, though now considerably reduced, establishment.

The first inquiry, when the ladies met, was always, as a matter of course, for little May, who, in the arms of Susanne, and followed by Bon-bon, generally formed her mother's escort, and who, by a series of crows and infantile expressions of delight, appeared to give unvarying applause and approbation to the different remarks that were made.

"May is sound asleep this morning," was the reply of Violet on this occasion, "and looks as rosy and charming as possible. I felt so dull after Major Harcourt left, that I could scarcely resist kissing her very hard, so that she might awake. I overcame the temptation, however, and covered her up instead, leaving Susanne sitting by her side, and stitching away industriously over some piece of finery, which, when finished, is to adorn my pet, and will make Susanne almost as proud of her as I am myself."

Dorothy Summerleigh laughed softly, but heartily, at such a probability being even possible. She then listened to the tidings which the morning post had brought, the most important being that of the expected arrival of Stanley Wyldish.

"I am so glad," she exclaimed, when she heard of it. "You have been looking more anxious than usual the last few days. I always know that, when such is the case, something fresh is perplexing you; but I share your unbounded faith in the wisdom and goodness of Captain Wyldish. He is, from circumstances, almost like a brother to you, since he and your husband were brought up as though that relationship existed between them. He will stay with us a few days, I hope, and will help me to persuade you to leave home before the cold weather commences."

During this speech she continued busy with the flowers, and she tripped about the

room, putting each vase and basket, when arranged, in its proper place.

She was a wonderful little woman in her way. Full of energy and resources, she had a quick eye for a pathway out of difficulties, and a warm heart for all who needed counsel and sympathy. Nothing ever daunted her for long, nor did she create troubles by the weakness of going out of her path to meet them half way.

"There must be troubles," she would say, "or we should all be too happy in the world, with its beautiful hills and dales, birds and flowers, and all the other beauties of creation, but," she would continue, "if we do not fold our hands and shut our eyes in despair, but look carefully about, we shall generally discover in every trouble, a crevice, if ever so small, which will let the sun in again, but if we fail to find it, we must be patient, and feel sure that it exists somewhere, and that it will soon grow wide enough for us to see it."

But, with all her hopefulness, she knew that there are especial trials, over which the cloud of suffering must hang long and heavily. Such an one was the bereavement which Violet had sustained, and she affectionately and diligently endeavoured to lighten its heaviness as much as possible.

“Will you drive this afternoon, Violet?” she asked, cheerily. “Your groom reports that Quicksilver will become more refractory than ever, if he does not soon feel your hands upon him, and he will be growing so fat, through lack of sufficient exercise, that his beauty will be endangered; besides, old Lady Marchmont will begin to wonder at our absence, and to think it unkind, if you do not go and see her. The drive will brighten you for our visitor, who, I think you told me, cannot arrive until past seven. On our way home we can call at the Rectory, and leave some grapes for Mrs. Matingley. I promise

you, if Mr. Matingley is at home, that I will not ask him any questions about parish matters. I have not yet forgotten the forcible lesson which you conveyed to me the other day, by those two very audible yawns in the middle of my inquiries. Well, it is a fortunate thing I am not a man, or, at any rate, a clergyman, for I am sure that I should over-parochialize my people frightfully, and so the old women would never get their tea, or the old men smoke their pipes, in peace, for fear of my invading visits."

"You would be just the right person in the right place, dear Dorothy," returned Violet, "whatever you might be, and a living illustration, as I verily believe our good Mr. Matingley to be, that round men do sometimes get into round holes, and square men into square holes."

"But, oh! Bon-bon! Bon-bon! you naughty little fellow," she cried, "you have been asleep upon my work all this time," and lifting her

old favourite, she deposited him carefully on a warm soft mat instead.

"I shall like your proposed drive," she resumed: "the excitement of a battle with Quicksilver will amuse me, and Bon-bon will be supremely happy, when he finds that he is to have a place on my lap; but I shall make him run home from the Rectory, since much petting and little running are becoming rather trying to the beauty of his proportions also. Now, I will pay my morning visit to the outdoor pets before May wakes up. I dare say you will think it very absurd of me, but even now I do not like to take her to the stables with me, lest she should grow as ridiculously fond of horses as her mother; and with no one to take care of her but myself, I mean her to be a very model of propriety and decorum. I have already sketched out so many different plans for her education that it seems likely to result in her having no education at all."

"Let me see," replied Dorothy Summerleigh, smiling, and showing a nice set of firm, even, white teeth, "Miss May Vivien is now nearly eleven months old. I really hope, Violet, that you are sufficiently penitent for having neglected your duty to her so much as to have allowed her to reach this mature age without having looked properly into her governess's references, and without even having settled what celebrity, in the shape of a singing master, shall have the honour of giving her the few last lessons before she comes out."

"I knew you would laugh at me," Violet answered, and smiling, too, a little herself. "But, positively, I do spend many hours thinking over it, and often grow quite nervous lest I should make some mistake. And then, you know," she added, as her face saddened and her voice faltered, "May and I have no one to help us in each other. My poor little May!" she murmured, almost inaudibly. If

Bon-bon could have spoken he would have told how hot the few large tears were, which fell upon his head, as she took him up in her arms and patted him.

Then rising hastily, she continued, "I must go now. Will you kindly give orders for rooms to be prepared for Captain Wyldish, and impress upon the housekeeper that a more substantial repast than she generally provides for our feminine appetites will be necessary this evening?"

CHAPTER VIII

"But bears its blossom into Winter's clime."

PUNCTUALLY at three o'clock Quicksilver was waiting before the door, and Bon-bon lying at full length upon the ground close by, seemed to be keeping guard, as if determined that his mistress should not give him the slip by driving off without him. Before long his frantic barks of delight announced that she was coming, and in a few minutes the little carriage-party had started.

The day was lovely, and Violet's spirits revived as she guided her favourite along the road.

Lady Marchmont was very old and very

deaf, but nevertheless she was a splendid specimen of an English gentlewoman. She might have served as a study for a painter, as she sat in her fine old drawing-room, with its antique furniture of white and gilt covered with crimson satin.

When her visitors arrived she was sitting in a high-backed chair, dressed, as usual, in black velvet, with white muslin crossed in folds over her bosom, and fastened at her throat by a small diamond brooch, with a large black lace shawl draped carefully around her.

Although more than eighty years of age, she still bore traces of remarkable personal beauty, and as if to compensate for her loss of hearing, her other senses remained in wonderful preservation. She had a deep affection for Violet, who had spent many, many happy hours listening to her tales of the interests and glories of days gone by.

She stretched out her hand affectionately,

long before Violet could traverse the large apartment to take it, and she looked almost as though she had never moved since Violet first saw her thus seated, when she came with her husband to pay their bridal visit.

Violet always remembered that day, and even now could scarcely repress a smile as she thought of it. She recollected so well the pleasurable novelty of hearing herself announced as "Mrs. Vivien," and the degree of awe with which she took the low seat placed for her close to her ladyship, while Arundel seemed to go an interminable distance from her, and commence a conversation with two ladies at the other end of the room.

Lady Marchmont, like some deaf persons, spoke in an unusually high and loud tone of voice, and on that occasion, the little bride's astonishment was great at hearing herself thus addressed. A good deal startled, and blushing deeply, she was about to reply, but before

she had time to do so, her ladyship suddenly brandished a large silver trumpet from under her lace shawl, and placing it to one of her ears bent solemnly towards her.

Utterly bewildered, and without the faintest notion of what she was expected to do, the answer died away on Violet's lips, and before she could frame another, her amazement was still further increased by the appearance, from the same hiding-place, of a second trumpet of equal size, and apparently the counterpart of the first. Lady Marchmont slowly laid the one, which she had been holding to her ear, on her lap, and supplied its place with the other.

A dim idea floated through Violet's brain that perhaps she ought to take hold of one, and shout down the other, but which to take hold of, or which to shout down, was quite beyond her comprehension. At last she was relieved by Lady Marchmont herself.

"I use these, my dear," she exclaimed,

"in preference to tubes and other instruments invented for the relief of persons similarly afflicted as myself. I have tried nearly every invention, but I like my two old trumpets best, and I always have them both with me, for sometimes I fancy I can hear better with one, and sometimes better with the other."

Struck by the absurdity, from which this timely remark had rescued her, Violet could with difficulty subdue a hearty fit of laughter, and her appealing glances and heightened colour brought her husband to her side. He quickly understood something of the dilemma into which his wife had been placed, and, greatly to her relief, commenced talking to the holder of the formidable trumpet.

Now, however, all was changed, and Violet felt quite at home, and at her ease, by Lady Marchmont's side, who inquired immediately for news of little May.

"Quite well, I am happy to say, and growing very fast," answered Violet. "I should like to have brought her with me, but Quicksilver and Bon-bon are quite enough responsibility for one afternoon. The constitutions of both so sorely needed exercise, that I was obliged to give up bringing her."

"I fear you are not so well yourself, my dear," kindly responded Lady Marchmont. "You have brought some very delicate cheeks for me to look at again."

"It is only my black dress that makes me look so white, I assure you," said Violet, "so please do not look at Miss Summerleigh's incredulous smile, for I am perfectly well. If you could have seen me yesterday, running about with May in my arms, and Bon-bon barking and jumping up at us, until she nearly flew out of my grasp with delight, I am sure you would have pronounced me to be as strong as possible. But tell me, dear Lady

Marchmont, something of yourself, for it is an age since I saw you last."

"Deafer than ever, I think, but well," responded Lady Marchmont, "and with such good accounts from India, that I have been feeling more than usually cheerful. Thank God, my eyes keep strong, and I can see to read all my dear son's letters, and to write back to him myself.

He talks of coming home next year, but a year is a long time, for one who has travelled so far on the road of life as I have, to look forward to, so I do not allow myself to dwell upon it. My days have been so full of mercies, however, that I feel sure, if it be for our good, it will be granted to us, and therefore, dear Violet, I am quite content and patient."

Violet looked at the calm, benign old face before her, and repeated inwardly the words, "quite content and patient."

Very often, afterwards, she pondered over

them, and wondered whether, even should she live to be so old as Lady Marchmont, she would ever be able to say of herself—"quite content and patient."

CHAPTER IX.

"No friend's a friend, till he shall prove a friend."

* * * * *

SNOW and sleet, frozen window panes, and slippery roads had ceased to be. Red cheeks no longer became redder, white ones whiter, under the bracing influence of a freezing atmosphere. Shivering schoolboys, with noses as crimson as their comforters, and with still more crimson knuckles, no more beheld the slide, which had often proved too tempting for their punctuality, and which had led them to play the truant, as they warmed themselves and their frozen intellects upon its polished track.

The muffin-bell rested calmly. It no longer

tinkled from side to side of the small streets of our great metropolis.

Cabmen had forgotten to beat their breasts. Not in token, be assured, of penitence for exorbitant fares demanded more particularly from foreigners and ladies, but only to prevent their fingers from being as benumbed as their consciences.

The winter was over. London was becoming full, in anticipation of the season which had not yet fairly commenced.

Two young men, the sole occupants of a handsome billiard-room, in a house in —— Square, were discussing the merits of the opera, which had opened that night, and from which they had only just returned.

They were brothers and evidently at home in the place in which they stood. Their well-bred and aristocratic appearance agreed with the unmistakable signs of wealth and luxury with which they were surrounded, and also with the size of the house, and its fashionable situation.

The elder of the two scarcely appeared to be more than seven or eight and twenty years of age, while the younger might have been a couple of years his junior. They were sons of Mr. and Lady Gertrude Cranmore, and were thus early in town somewhat against their inclination. Contrary to the fashion of the age they were dutiful sons, and, in this instance, had followed the wishes of their parents, rather than their own. The elder was, on this occasion, perhaps, influenced to a more ready obedience on account of his approaching marriage with a pretty penniless cousin; a marriage to which Mr. and Lady Gertrude Cranmore had with difficulty been persuaded to give their consent, and one which was not at all in accordance with their views on marital matters, concerning so important a person as their eldest son.

"Did you see Stanley Wyldish, Fred?" said Basil, the younger of the two, to his

brother. "He was just opposite to us. I am annoyed that I did not speak to him. But he did not stay more than half an hour, and vanished just as I was going over to him. He looked awfully seedy, and if half what the fellows in the regiment say be true—no wonder. I must hunt him up to-morrow, for I saw Dallingcourt hanging about him, and we all know what he, and that set, did for him not so many years ago in Malta. I did not like the look of him, and there was a spice of the old recklessness which always betrays itself in his outward man when he is vexed with himself. But it is waste of breath talking to you, Fred. I believe that the whole opera was a dead letter to you, and that you saw no living creature but your fiancée, who, by-the-way, even our mother confessed, was looking superbly handsome."

"I saw Wyldish though," Frederick Cranmore answered promptly. "But I cannot say that I examined him very minutely.

I don't care enough about the fellow. Besides, I am not given to the study of the human character. If a man cannot take care of himself, you may stake your existence that nobody else can do so for him. Don't look so serious over it, Basil—Wyldish played the fool once, and found out afterwards that he did not like the consequences. If he has been ass enough to do it again, I advise you to let him flounder out of the mess as best he can. People, who oscillate continually between folly and wisdom, irritate me exceedingly, and are, I consider, the most disappointing beings out. I am not launching the whole of this tirade at the head of Wyldish, although I admit that it puzzles me to know why you stick so pertinaciously to your old friendship for him. Have you heard the report, that Dallingcourt is going to marry a Manchester girl, with two thousand a year? I more than doubt it myself. Those manufacturers, as a race, are hard-headed and close-fisted. I believe he

has only given it out in the hope of silencing his duns for a time. If one could get at the truth, I suspect that he bleeds Wyldish pretty freely."

"Poor old Wyldish," ejaculated Basil. "He is a right down good fellow. However hard-up he may be himself, he always contrives somehow to help his friends. I hate to see him sponged upon by such a hungry crew, as I saw hovering about him to-night. I hear, too, that Inah Dallingcourt is laying siege to him again, and that she has opened the campaign afresh, with such desperate determination, that the betting is ten to one upon her winning. I hardly think it can be so. He is much older now; I wouldn't believe a word of it at first. But it is a bad sign to see the brother with him, for it was a stroke of the old policy with the fair Inah, to fasten her brother upon him, wherever she could not go herself. It did not prove a successful one, for he was the aider and abettor of that

which frustrated the design of both brother and sister. In spite of failure then, I am afraid their tactics are the same now. Wyldish is as unsuspicious as a baby, of underhand dealing of any kind. It would be a jolly temperament to possess, if there were not serpents abroad, as well as doves; but as it is, I am inclined to think it dangerous."

"Confounded laziness, you mean, Basil," broke in Fred, presenting, as he spoke, a perfect type in attitude and appearance of the characteristic he had mentioned. "It is too much trouble for some people to take precautions for their own safety. Useful members of society doubtless—conductors who attract the dishonest."

"And who, at times, hurl them with pretty considerable force to the ground," interposed Basil; and then he continued, "You don't know Wyldish, Fred. Generalities won't apply to him."

"All right, old boy," answered Fred care-

lessly, "but, as I said before, I am no analyst of character. By-the-by, what does Dallingcourt, senior, say to all this?"

"I do not imagine that anybody has taken the trouble to inquire," returned Basil, "but it is nevertheless easy to understand, that he would not object to have the various stories which are afloat, concerning his daughter, silenced by her marriage with the eldest son of a good old family."

The brothers puffed the smoke leisurely from their cigars for a few moments in silence, after Basil had finished speaking. Then he commenced again.

"Inah Dallingcourt is a handsome girl; but she has passed the first blush of youth and beauty. It makes me as savage as a bear to think there may be even a probability of Wyldish falling, in his heedless way, into the trap, which, I have no doubt, every one else can see is being laid for him. He looked so wretched and done up altogether,

to-night, that, unless I am very much mistaken, there is something wrong. I shall, however, look him up to-morrow. He has done me many a good turn, and I would go far out of my way if I thought I could serve him. I am glad that I came up to town now. I shall stumble upon him somewhere. I know most of his old haunts, and rather pride myself upon my sagacity in hunting up people, when I wish to see them."

"Run them to ground, eh, Basil?" was the sleepily spoken interposition.

"Something rather like it, Fred. Wyldish swears that I run along the gas-pipes, and then rise up suddenly under the noses of the man, woman, or child I most wish to meet."

Frederick Cranmore flung away the end of his cigar, and roused himself with evident effort from his comfortable position on the sofa. Then, after having loudly yawned two or three times, he said :—

"The governor should have made a Bow Street officer of you. But I cannot sacrifice any more of my rest upon the altar of your friendship for Wyldish : so good-night. If I do not see you in the morning, look me up at the Club between three and four o'clock. I am going to have luncheon with the Bartletts, and shall go there afterwards."

Basil wished his brother good-night, without following his example of retiring.

He took a fresh cigar from the stand, and lighted it. Then throwing himself into a luxurious-looking easy-chair, and resting his feet on another, he re-commenced smoking.

He had a handsome face, which bore a firm and intelligent expression. His forehead was well developed, and his eyes, which were rather deeply set, were keen and piercing. There was an unusual gravity over his whole demeanour, as he remained

for some time without moving. He was evidently thinking of the friend about whom he had just been conversing, and a shade of irritation might occasionally have been detected passing over his countenance.

He was not a man to act suddenly or impulsively, and he was meditating over how much he had heard, and how little he had seen. Few knew Stanley Wyldish so well as he. They had been fast friends in school-days, and when Basil Cranmore obtained his commission, he succeeded in getting appointed to the same regiment. Since the death of Arundel Vivien, he was, perhaps, the only one outside the walls of Greyford Hall, who possessed the key which could unlock the depth of feeling contained in the character of Stanley Wyldish.

He was vexed at that which his visit to the opera had seemed to unfold to him, and

he was reviewing mentally many conversations which they had held with each other at various times. Ill fortune, he knew, had singularly enough recently quartered him in the very place, of all others, which he most wished to avoid. And he was also aware, that after having inveighed against it in his own language as a "most confounded piece of bad luck," he had dismissed from his mind all dread of its consequences, and had gone on trusting that somehow or other no harm would come of it. The reports which had now reached Basil seemed to point to a different conclusion.

"Basil, you old duffer," the merry voice of Stanley Wyldish had often said to him, and he recalled the words with a quickened interest now, "while you are thinking whether you will take a thing or not, I have done it. Nine times out of ten a jolly good cropper I get for my pains; but I do the same thing again and again, and so I expect it will be

right on to the end of the chapter. There is only one little woman who can stop me, and, by Jove, if she lifts up even the tip of one of her fingers, or gives me the faintest peep from under her long eyelashes, I swerve, and round I go directly. If she had but crossed my path a little earlier, I should not have made the fool of myself which you at various times have seen me. But I have pulled myself together now, thank goodness, and with all my madness, it will not be easy to tempt me back to some of the old ways."

Basil knew the circumstances which confirmed these statements. With this insight to guide him, as he sat in the quiet night thinking with more than brotherly affection of his old friend and companion, his concluding reflection coincided with the opinion which he had expressed to his brother, that no such change could have come over the buoyant, light-hearted bearing

of Stanley Wyldish, except from some annoyance consequent upon the Dallingcourt influence.

He had seen its power once before, and he recognized it when he saw it again.

CHAPTER X.

"Love that hath us in the net."

"VERY much champagne, very little soda, and very many oysters, old fellow! I mean to have a 'big eat,' and a 'big drink,' before you go. Why on earth, Wyldish, you should start on a night like this to take a long railway journey alone, in a dismal carriage, just that you may arrive in time to see a pretty widow eat her breakfast, I can't conceive. I have a good mind to split upon you, and tell Dallingcourt that you are going. I'll lay my brown mare against your old hat that you don't get off if he knows it. Just have the humanity to picture to yourself the

lovely Inah, distractedly tearing her yellow hair and flinging it recklessly about by handfuls, when she learns whither you have vanished."

"Come, come, Charlie, shut up, and for mercy's sake drink chablis instead of champagne with those oysters, if you are bent upon a 'big eat,' as you call it. Dallingcourt will not stop me, I can tell you. I am off to-night, and in less than an hour, too. I am sorry that I could not keep my appointment with you this afternoon ; I was on my way to do so, when I met Cranmore."

"Basil, or the much-esteemed Fred ?" was the ironical query which interrupted the speaker, who looked up with an impatient gesture and replied,

"Basil, to be sure ; my old chum. What have I to do with Frederick Cranmore ? Basil was just the man I most wished to see, and, consequently, the least expected ; however, he turned up at the right moment. I

was coming out of Cox's in a frame of mind befitting a man who has just failed to make terms with them for an advance of cash. I have been hit rather hard once or twice lately, and therefore I don't care to go to my father, so I tried to take the bull by the horns in this manner, but the brute would not stand it. I was stalking out of the place after my unsuccessful encounter, when I heard my name called out, and there stood Basil."

"Trying to get money also, I suppose?" again interrupted the listener.

"Money! Not a bit of it. The Cranmores have piles of it. Old Cranmore is, if possible, richer than any Jew; and he and his eldest son know, as well as any two men you can find, how to keep it. Basil is out and out the best of the bunch; he is not a bit of a screw. When he was in the regiment he did everything a deuced deal better than I do, upon half the money. He

sold out, you know, a little while before I got my company. He is a sort of fellow who hits the happy medium. Bother the money! it filters through my fingers like water through a grating. But how late it is growing. As I said before, I am off to-night. I am going to catch the mail train."

"What an intolerable nuisance you are, Wyldish," was the rejoinder, "flying over the country like an escaped convict; and if I had to give evidence on the point, I should say a lunatic. Why cannot you take things easily, and stay quietly with me in town to-night?"

" 'Very much quiet,' to borrow your way of expressing it, I guess, I should have with you in town to-night," retorted Wyldish; and then he added, laughingly, "Don't devour quite all the oysters, you young ruffian. I have a journey before me, which you have not."

"I know that," replied the other. "And I know something else equally important, and that is, if this child, meaning myself, had anything half as charming at the end of it as your little widow, he would not care for vulgar unpoetical feeding, even though it were off oysters. He would," he continued, with an absurdly comical imitation of a tragical attitude, "immolate them all to his devotion for her, and his unbounded affection for the chosen friend of his bosom—meaning myself again."

"You very ugly likeness of a most remarkably ugly ape, will you do as I have asked you and keep quiet?" growled Wyldish.

Upon which the person addressed, an uncommonly good-looking young man, laughed uproariously.

"Keep quiet?" he repeated, "of course I will, if I can only get some more supper. Upon my word my chance of getting another

oyster seems to be growing smaller by degrees and beautifully less. I expect to see the beards and shells vanish next down your capacious throat. The pace at which they are disappearing is fearfully startling."

.The Honourable Charlie Anderton, who thus spoke, was one of those whom Basil Cranmore had seen the night before at the opera with Stanley Wyldish. Although somewhat hungry upon the present occasion, it was after the ordinary human wholesome fashion. He was not one of those who could be included in the meaning of the term used in the sense in which Basil Cranmore had used it.

"I wonder what the widow would say," he continued, "if she could see you now, and be an eye-witness to oysters, which cost five shillings a score, being consumed at the rate of five hundred a minute."

"Once more—will you be quiet, Charlie? For pity's sake eat oysters, beads and shells, or do any mortal thing you like, except talk of people whom you do not know, and whom you have never even seen."

"You are a nice convivial sort of a fellow to-night, Wyldish, I must confess. I am rapidly changing my mind about this solitary midnight railway journey of yours. I think it would be the best thing for you. Take my advice, however, and smoke yourself into a more amiable mood on the road, or I fear that the world in general, and the fascinating lady in particular, would not derive much benefit from your society when you reach your destination."

To this remark Stanley Wyldish vouchsafed no reply. After taking a copious draught of wine he rose from the table, and commenced leisurely examining the pile of wraps which had been placed on the sofa in readiness for him. The inspection proving

to be satisfactory, he proceeded to envelop himself in a huge Ulster coat, richly trimmed with fur.

Meanwhile, Mr. Anderton leaned his back against the mantelpiece, and, with his hands thrust into his pockets, remained wholly absorbed in contemplating the movements of his friend, until a sharp ring at the hall door-bell aroused him. He crossed the room to look out of the window, when he exclaimed :

“Your brougham, Wyldish, and it is raining cats and dogs, besides blowing half a dozen hurricanes. What weather for the ‘mild and genial spring,’ as they term it in the language of the poets. Are you at all poetical, Wyldish ? because, if so, you can amuse yourself, en route, by spouting odes to spring, to the first primrose, or to the wild thyme that grows on a bank. Let me see, by-the-way, that is a song, is it not ? But it doesn’t matter, it’s all the same, and will do

just as well for you. Imagine how jolly you will look wrapped up in that coat, with your legs on the seat opposite you, plaintively warbling to yourself innocent little ditties like this, or holding a private recitation for your own edification. You might call it an 'hour with the poets;' and if the carriage be as full of smoke as your residence therein for a short period generally makes one, it would be jolly pleasant, and good for your lungs, I should say. Music hath charms, you know, and——"

"Music be hanged!" Stanley Wyldish replied, "but I wish something would, for a short time, mercifully stop the music of your warbling tongue. However, you will have to apostrophize the chairs and tables now, for I must go. Good-bye, Anderton, I shall see you again soon. Take care of yourself."

"What can be the matter with the man?"

ejaculated the now solitary occupant of the room. "I have been doing my best to make myself agreeable, and to persuade him to talk for the last hour and a half, but have got nothing for my pains, except growls and grunts, with a spice of abuse into the bargain. I suppose it is the old story, 'Women and money.' My small experience tells me that they go a good deal together. Somehow they run in couples. At any rate," he proceeded, "I cannot stand being alone."

He looked around him, rather ruefully, as he spoke, and then shouted lustily for his servant, whom he heard in the next room. A smart-looking man appeared quickly to his summons.

"Fetch me a cab, James," was the order given, with an evidently relieved mind at the prospect of something more cheerful than his own society, and he added,

"Don't get drowned on the road, for I am in a hurry, and cannot wait while you are performing such an interesting tragedy."

CHAPTER XI.

"Looks, and longs, and longs, and wishes for its opening day."

It was a miserably wet night when Charlie Anderton despatched his servant for a vehicle.

Cold, too, as December, and if not blowing half a dozen hurricanes, in accordance with the somewhat startling announcement which had been made to Stanley Wyldish, and which, if taken literally, might very much interfere with the pre-conceived notions which some of us entertain upon the subject of north, south, east, and west, it was certainly blowing one, and that a very hard one.

The gaslights flickered, and the street looked dismal in the extreme, as Stanley Wyldish hastily crossed the pavement from the house to his brougham, while the wind swept chillily around him, striving its best to extinguish his lighted cigar. The coachman had long received his orders. Without a word, therefore, Stanley Wyldish entered the carriage, and in another instant it was rolling rapidly away with him.

Master and man were widely separated in the degree of creature comfort, or rather discomfort, which each experienced during that drive in the cold pelting rain to the railway-station. Upon reaching it the sulky tones of the voice of the former might have been moderated as he spoke to the officials, if he had indulged in any effort of moralizing upon the matter. We must admit, however, that he had some provocation for his discontent. The men were sleepy and stupid, to an irritating degree, and looked as if they

were fully persuaded that every fresh passenger who arrived, was a personal insult and grievance to themselves.

Moreover, he found, to his disgust, that he had rather more than ten minutes to wait before the train would start. Ten minutes to an impatient man in an uncomfortable position, with nothing to amuse him in his restlessness, seems an age. The book-stalls were closed, and the dimly-lighted waiting-room looked dingy, and as uninviting as possible. A bottle of cold water, with a muddy-looking tumbler by its side, and an open Bible, stood on the centre of a large mahogany table, which looked bare, gaunt, and ill-proportioned, since it was not covered by the freight of bags, parcels, shawls, umbrellas, sunshades, and the multitudinous articles which the busier hours of day called upon it to bear.

The leather sofas were unoccupied, with the exception of one, upon which sat a lady

and a gentleman, who looked remarkably small specimens of their species in the large dreary apartment, and who sat very close to each other, thereby occupying less space, and making themselves appear smaller than they really were. They carried on a monotonous, half-whispered conversation from time to time, interspersed alternately with such frightful yawns from the one and the other, that it was quite impossible for the most vivid imagination to weave anything approaching to a romance around them, or their situation. But mortals are short-sighted, and oftentimes quite blind. Prosaic as the two appeared, perhaps, individually, their experience of life could have furnished matter for a three-volume novel.

Stanley Wyldish stood six feet one without the help of his boots, and of late had grown somewhat stalwart. His footstep, by no means a fairy-like one, on entering the waiting-room, so aroused the solitary occupants,

that they looked up with some attempt at a show of wakefulness, as he strode across the room to the fireplace, when, after deliberately taking a general survey, and honouring them with a prolonged steady British stare, he crossed the room, slammed the door, and disappeared.

Our story has nothing to do with those whom he left behind him, so let us keep close to the object of our interest, and follow him to the platform.

"Is my luggage in and all right, porter?" said his well-recognized voice.

"All right, sir; bell just going to ring, sir," returned the porter, as he moved towards the compartment in which he had stowed away the lighter portion of the baggage alluded to, and held open the door. He was less sleepy, now that the time for the chance of that forbidden fruit, so sweet to a porter—a tip—had arrived.

The tip was forthcoming. Lucky porter,

thus to have the wish of the moment gratified. But the donor was not one to be hurried. After dropping the coin into the covertly extended palm of the man's hand, he stood as immovable as a piece of rock, until the train was almost in motion.

There was a snort—a scream—a gasp from the mighty engine, and in a few seconds its red lights were leaving London far behind in the distance.

A face looked out into the darkness from the window of a first-class smoking carriage. As it remained with its forehead pressed against the glass, watching the great metropolis until it was lost to sight, its harassed, careworn expression gradually relaxed, giving place to one of intense relief.

After a lapse of a few seconds, the earnest countenance was withdrawn, and Stanley Wyldish, with almost a smile, wrapped his rugs around him, and prepared for his coming journey. He knew that many hours must

elapse ere it could be over. But of this he took no heed. He was intent only upon the end, and like all eager, ardent spirits, he ignored the wayside difficulties and discomforts.

Scanning his face by the light which the lamp in the carriage shed across it, we would that we could shut our eyes to many a line imprinted there by the indelible hand of mental pain.

Aladdin's lamp, so famed, and so glorious to the dreams of our childhood, for giving, when found, a reality to the wildest wishes of its possessors, would be a far less precious boon to mortals, generally, than some talisman, which could smooth for ever, from heart and brow, all record of the past.

Ay! even though it left the page of our life's history a blank.

Most of us may remember some well and dearly loved face, from which we have longed to press all trace of care. One,

perchance, which we have drawn closely to us, and have loved so passionately, that we have almost deemed the touch of our lip and hand must possess the charm for which we wish.

Yet, this cannot be. Marah's waters have been found bitter, although glittering, and where shall we find on earth the branch with which to make them sweet again ?

So, as we continue our scrutiny of Stanley Wyldish, and as we recognize much of the old frankness and manliness which distinguish him, we miss the fearlessness.

Sorely against our will, we perceive much of that recklessness and determination, which are the work of expediency and remorse, and which are leaving deepening shadows behind them.

It would be well for us all sometimes, if dressing-case and luggage were all the care which we bore with us on our journeys.

But, as we have already remarked, almost a smile is now playing over the countenance of Stanley Wyldish. Soft gleams of a coming pleasure are forcing back the furrowed lines, and bright anticipation is gaining the victory over retrospection.

The motion of the train, as it sped on its course through the hours of midnight, was not more rapid than the succession of thoughts which eddied through his brain.

At length the cold, stormy night was over, and the dawn of day told that his solitary travelling was almost finished.

His dreams had been waking ones, wild as sleeping ones, and brilliant with all the extravagant colouring of an imagined happiness.

If he occasionally aroused himself therefrom, with the troubled start of a sleeper, to find them only visionary, he quickly lulled himself to rest again, and to the delirium of their fancied joy.

Memory and the past were hushed to stillness and repose, while he with wide-open, wakeful eyes, still dreamed on fondly and hopefully.

CHAPTER XII.

"Only my heart, to my heart, shall show it."

VIOLET VIVIEN had been awaiting the arrival of Stanley Wyldish with much satisfaction.

During the intervening months of winter he had frequently seen her. The bravery, of which she had boasted, was more difficult to maintain than she had supposed.

"I make one step forward," she would say piteously of herself, "and then slip two backward, while my courage flees before emergencies."

Many an imaginary terror, therefore, had caused her to send a message on wings of

wire, summoning him to her aid. Unhappily, some of the business details connected with her affairs, had not gone on prosperously. If she had understood them better, her anxiety would have been increased. But, in addition to her want of knowledge, her thoughts dwelt too much on the life that had been, to allow her to be anxious about the present.

Stanley Wyldish was thankful for this. Many unforeseen difficulties had arisen, owing to the failure of a bank, in which Arundel Vivien had been a large shareholder. This catastrophe quickly followed his decease, and created much consternation amongst the friends of Violet. At that time her health was not sufficiently strong, for the information to be imparted to her with safety.

Stanley Wyldish, however, battled manfully, in order to stem the current of heavy calls which rushed in upon her, as the execu-

trix, and representative, therefore, of her husband. The reduced expenditure at Greyford Hall, attendant upon the strict seclusion into which Violet had retired, materially assisted him. He was sanguine that the ultimate result of his negotiations might remove all necessity that the matter should be brought prominently before her. In this hope he was seconded by the best legal advice.

His first idea, after the shock, occasioned by the news of the heavy loss of property which Violet must sustain, was to persuade her to leave Greyford Hall, for a time. But he found that she clung so tenaciously to the scenes of her happy married life, that he was compelled to relinquish the plan.

Moreover, to have pressed the point, would inevitably have called forth questions which he was most anxious to evade.

The transmission of sums of money, for which her signature was required, was effected

without difficulty. Her simple and invariable interrogation to him was, "Is this what my husband would like me to do?"

The assurance was speedily given by him whom her husband had enjoined her to trust; therefore it met with unquestioning faith.

So Violet remained in the home, that was dear to her from many associations, and lived her changed life in the manner in which she knew and felt she best could.

She gathered comfort from the kindly hearts and ready sympathy of the people by whom she was surrounded, while her interest in them was daily increased, as she carried on the many good works, which had been commenced by her husband.

It afforded a pure and unselfish gratification to Stanley Wyldish to listen to her plans, and to behold her continuing in the place which he had worked so diligently to secure to her. Although a bad financier to himself, he had proved an acute and clever one for another.

And he well deserved the reward due to those who succour the unprotected.

As he journeyed, on this especial occasion, to Greyford Hall, he was perplexed by manifold anxieties, but he determined to dismiss them for the present, and allow nothing to disturb the happiness and peace which invariably stole over him when there.

A rapid toilet, after his arrival, soon made him presentable. He found Violet waiting for him amongst her flowers in the verandah.

The many-coloured blossoms were pouring out a delicate perfume around her, while a bright beam of morning sunlight was shining over her. Her hair was still partially concealed by a soft white covering, and she had not yet altered the deep mourning of her dress. She was looking less fragile, however, than when Lady Marchmont bewailed the pallor of her cheeks.

"What a night you have had for your journey," she said presently. "If this dear

old house of mine had been less substantial, we must have been blown or washed away. As it was, you ran a great risk of finding us homeless and roofless on your arrival."

How often jesting remarks hinge upon the very strain of sadness which we have determined to forget, and how little do they, who make them, estimate the shafts which they are pointing at the listener, or the waves of troubled thought which they are stirring.

Thus Violet jested on, lightly and pleasantly, painting, in her imagination, ludicrous scenes of May and herself, with house and household gods blown about them, and with no place where to ask their guest to partake of breakfast, except under the hedges and trees.

Stanley Wyldish laughed as naturally as he could, while, at the same time, he did his best to divert her imagery into some other channel. The topic grated upon his feelings, since it was too painfully suggestive of that

which he was striving with might and main to avert.

But the notion, oddly enough, seemed to please her vastly, or it might have been that she took refuge in it, until the first few minutes of their meeting had passed. Once or twice she laughed quite merrily at some of her own absurdities.

The arrival of Dorothy Summerleigh turned the conversation. 'Tripping towards them, she conveyed a world of welcome in her simple expression: "How do you do, Captain Wyldish?"

Continuing, she said, "I heard Mrs. Vivien laughing, therefore I have come to see if you have both forgotten breakfast, and to remind you that bacon and coffee are not improved by waiting too long. You at least, Captain Wyldish, must be hungry."

"I had not thought about it," he replied, "but I believe I am in rather a ravenous condition, now that I am reminded of it. I

really must be excused, however, until I have paid my respects, in proper form, to Miss Vivien."

"What a dreadful impostor he is," laughed out Violet from among the flowers; "I do not believe he cares for children one scrap. It is good of him, however, to flatter my weakness; and although I recognize the imposition, nevertheless I like it so much that I will not resent it. But you have been very rash, Captain Wyldish, and I shall take you at your word, and make you come and give May a kiss directly, which *I* think worth any risk of frozen coffee and petrified bacon; so come at once, for I expect she has already been looking for me in the boudoir."

They were pleasant to look at, as they passed lightly through the room, he following her so closely, and willingly, and she with her eyes full of a young mother's pride and love.

Dorothy Summerleigh looked after them

•

as if she thought so too, but she had a great affection for them. Even without that, she possessed such a power of throwing a light around the veriest commonplaces of life, that had the two been less fair and comely to look upon, she would probably still have sent after them that kindly smile of approbation. Rare indeed was the occasion over which she did not strike some pleasant chord, making it vibrate with her own unselfish geniality.

Two or three days glided happily away. Morning drifted into afternoon, and afternoon into evening, while Stanley Wyldish took little heed of time, but floated on in contentment, as perfect as the enchanted repose of a lotus-eater. He found, as usual, that many things had accumulated which needed his attention. Among them were workpeople, indoors and out-of-doors, to be suprintended, and numberless mistakes in the intricacies of arithmetic to be set straight. There was no

limit to the patient attention with which he not only listened to Violet, as she unfolded to him, half sadly, half mockingly, the various grievances which had arisen since he left her, but also endeavoured to reduce to order the chaos which her hands had more than once wrought in her account-book.

“Telegram for you, sir, if you please,” solemnly announced the grave old butler, breaking in upon a merry party on the fourth morning after Stanley Wyldish had arrived at Greyford Hall. He was at that moment engaged in a regular game of romps with little May. Running round and round the room with her on his shoulder, and every now and then holding her out at arm’s length that she might try and catch her mother as she ran before them. At that particular crisis May had just made a sudden snatch at Violet, and succeeded, to her great delight, in dragging down a long tress of her mother’s hair.

"Telegram for you, sir, if you please," repeated the butler in a louder tone, finding that he had not been heard, and advancing a few steps nearer to the merry, breathless trio.

"What piece of bad luck have you there, Stevens?" burst from Stanley Wyldish, who, looking round, caught sight of the brown envelope lying on the silver salver. "Not for me, I hope?"

"Yes, sir; and I have told the messenger to wait, in case you might wish to send an answer."

The thin paper was impatiently torn open, while Violet took her child, and endeavoured to tuck away her dishevelled hair and look composed.

"Just what I expected," was the ejaculation from Stanley Wyldish. "They never can leave a wretched fellow in peace for a week together."

Violet looked up nervously as she said,

"I hope it is not to call you away. What a dreadful nuisance it would be."

Stanley Wyldish, without speaking, pointed to the paper which he held in his hand. At a glance she saw the words, "back, sudden inspection," &c., &c.

"What a dreadful nuisance!" she exclaimed again. "I wanted you, so much, to have been here when Lord Marchmont dines with us to-morrow."

"I am more vexed than I can express to you at having to leave you so quickly," said Stanley Wyldish; and, recollecting that the servant still waited, he turned to him and said, "No answer, Stevens. Go I must, but to spend a shilling upon saying so, would be rather too much of a good thing."

There was no more fun for baby May that day. Even Bon-bon seemed to guess that something was wrong. He eyed Stevens with a very dissatisfied air, looked disconsolately up at his mistress for a minute or two,

and then resignedly curled himself up for a doze.

The afternoon was completely engrossed by visitors, tiresome and dull in the extreme, and who prosed for hours over the most uninteresting subjects. But as they had driven a long distance to see Violet, they could not well be shaken off.

"What a provokingly long visit those people paid me this afternoon," she commenced, when Stanley Wyldish entered the drawing-room after dinner that evening. "I thought they never would go. You amused me immensely, Captain Wyldish, by looking so fearfully bored and impatient. If they had not been two of the most imperturbable women in existence, they must have retreated earlier. It was very tiresome of them to fix upon to-day for their visit, since you must leave at daybreak to-morrow. As soon as you are gone I know that I shall remember heaps about which I ought to have asked

you, of everything and everybody, myself and my future life included."

"Your future life, Mrs. Vivien?" and the sentence was echoed by Stanley Wyldish with a ghastly attempt at a smile. "Your future life?" he again repeated. "May I ask if you have formed any definite plans concerning it, of which I am unaware?"

The pause which ensued was embarrassing.

But Dorothy Summerleigh, with ready tact, began cheerfully to descant upon her own good fortune, in not having been caught in the drawing-room when the visitors were announced, and to describe how luxuriously she had finished the first volume of a new book while they were being entertained.

With this help the conversation soon flowed easily along.

At length Stanley Wyldish whispered gently :

"Will you let me talk to you for a little

time in the verandah, Mrs. Vivien? I will fetch some shawls if you will kindly come."

Violet blushed slightly as he led her to her favourite place. The lights came softly from the room which they had just quitted, while Dorothy Summerleigh, having opened the piano, played a succession of sweet old airs.

The verandah was filled with music, without disturbing the conversation of those who were within. They talked of Arundel, and of that especial time of sorrow and suffering which had terminated in such poignant grief; and then they spoke of more recent days.

As they conversed, long and earnestly, Violet felt, for the first time, that somehow she and Stanley Wyldish had gradually, but certainly, changed places; and that he, whom she had guided and advised, had imperceptibly become her counsellor. Even as she

sat there listening to his words, her mind was busy with its own analysis.

She remembered the promise which he had given her with regard to gambling, and a dim remembrance came to her that once she had been the stronger of the two. She struggled to think that soon she would regain her old position ; and that when her grief should become more subdued, she would resume the reins of government, and lose her present childlike dependence upon him. But, had not her grief brought this very dependence to pass ? She could hardly tell.

Nothing seemed clear to her, but that he was her greatest earthly comforter and protector.

And he!—had you asked him what that pensive, slender figure was to him, whom he was wrapping so tenderly from the fancied cold—his steady answer would have been. “ It has ever been my best life, my best in-

fluence ; but, now, it has grown to be my life
—my love.”

Words which he had breathed, again and
again, within his own soul, but which his lips
had never uttered.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Kind hearts are more than coronets.”

“So the cap’ain’s bin and gone agin,” said Jack Carrington, a rosy-faced, sandy-haired man to his wife, a sturdy-looking matron who was intently rocking the cradle which contained their last born. “I wonders how often he’ll come and go, and the lady up yonder still look so pale and woful-like—mercy ’ow he do sit and stare at her in church, to be sure, and she never takin’ a bit o’ notice on ’im, but sittin’ there with her book and her eyes down, just like a himage.”

“Maybe she don’t care for him, Jack,” answered his wife. “All ladies don’t care

for all gentlemen as cares for them, nor all women for all men as cares for them, for the matter o' that, and I reckon she's thinking more of the master, gone to heaven, than of any living cretur."

"P'r'aps you're right, old gal—p'r'aps you're right—But I'm sorry for the gentleman, too—He's a proper sort—don't grudge his money, and sits a horse wonderful. If the old place is to have a new master, we may go further and fare wus, to my thinkin'."

"There—there—don't yer talk about it, Jack. I've a fancy as how it would vex the mistress, and, dear heart, I'm sure she's 'ad enough to fret and vex her, without we village folk gossipin'. I minds her cryin' over me, when the little one went, and I were ill, and you was a'most drowned, Jack—all in her silks and laces she come, and her bonny hat with the white feather in it—I minds her pretty face, Jack, and her tears when she thought I'd nigh been a widder, and now

she's a widder herself, and the capting may well sit and stare at her, all so changed and woful like as she be, and he'll 'ave to sit and stare a bit longer, too, I knows. Law! Jack—do you think, now, as I'd ha' been and gone an' got married agin, all in a hurry, if you'd bin took that time?"

"Doesn't know, missus—doesn't know," replied Jack, doubtfully, "but they does talk a sight o' things about the cap'in and the lady, and they do say as he worships the werry ground she walks on."

"Let 'em talk, Jack—time will show, and if it would make her comfortable agin, I hope she'll say 'yes,' to 'im, some o' these fine days. —'Tain't always to be expected a young delicate lady like she can get along, all alone, with no near relations neither, and that big place and her child to take care on. Robbed, too! I knows she is, poor dear. I sees lots o' butter with the Hall print on it, in places where it didn't ought to be—and eggs—Well! eggs—

hard to tell—but I warrent some on em's laid not far off from where the butter's churned—and chickens—Well!—chickens—is hard to tell, same as eggs—'specially when they's plucked, but I doesn't like the looks o' some o' the legs an' beaks I sees about for sale; they looks like very near relations, Jack, to them as struts about, up above at the Hall yonder, and all three of these hartickles finds their way pretty reg'lar to the shop in the next village. There'll be a rare row some day when the capting's here a-looking over the farm accounts, and I for one 'opes there may be—Things 'as gone on long enough.

Poor dear!" she went on rocking the cradle a little more vigorously than before, "and she to have no mother neither. Well! the capting's not the only one as would serve her, I knows. There's the major, God bless 'im—as saved your life, Jack, and as has got a wife already, and there's the great lord, just come home from foreign parts, a nice, harmless, sensible

lookin' gentleman he be, too, 'cording to my way o' lookin' at 'im. I see him a-riding up the avenue pretty reg'lar. I hopes all these fine gentlemen won't bother her between 'em, and I've heard lords is very bad to deal with. Poor young lady! and only the other day, and the bells was a-ringin' and a-clanging for her weddin', and though they does talk, there's not a soul in the place as she hain't done a good turn by.

“What business is it o' theirn whether she haves the captin' or whether she haven't, I should like to know. They'll be a-findin' out all about the lord soon, and then they'll talk all the other way round, and think themselves mighty clever 'bout that. I'm rather afeerd o' lords, though, Jack. Mother used to tell me sich tales about their dancings here and prancings there, and 'ow they thinks no more of breaking ladies' 'arts than of eatin' their dinners, and all because they are real

lords, they never gets no blame from nobody for nothink."

Jack listened attentively to this speech from his wife, and then he said, quietly, "Well done, missus, you're just like the rest of the women folk; do yourself what you won't on no account let your old man do; blowing hot, and cold, too, with the same breath. Wouldn't ha' married agin yourself, wouldn't yer? Why shouldn't the young lady do it if she'd be more comfortable? Why, indeed? I never said as how she shouldn't. But never mind, old girl, you're a good wife, though I says that as shouldn't. And then the little 'uns—six as fine little 'uns as a man need wish to see, and'as a man may be proud on, though I says that, too, as shouldn't."

"Bless 'em," interrupted Susan, rocking the cradle with renewed maternal energy; "bless 'em. And don't let us forget, Jack, who pays for the schoolin' of the three biggest,

and who paid for the buryin' of the little one laid to rest."

Good Susan Carrington ! Truly refined at heart, and as thoroughly an English gentlewoman are you, in your simple gratitude and true judgment, as many an one, on whom a diamond necklace glitters, and whom a costly robe covers. And although your gown be of cotton, and your hands brown with toil for those you love, yet white and soft ones need not shrink from your grasp. Woman with woman, each in her own sphere, may grapple with the tide of evil, and uphold the pure and right.

The fears of Susan, with regard to the good conduct of the real lord in question, were, happily, groundless ; he was made of sterner and better material than to find pastime in breaking, or, rather, in trying to break, ladies' hearts. His return from India had occurred earlier than the time mentioned by Lady Marchmont to Violet, and he had

experienced the inexpressible delight of finding his mother but little altered by age since he had left her. State affairs had called him abroad. The parting had been one of anguish to Lady Marchmont, but she was a too highly-bred politician, and too patriotic, to place any impediment in his way, or to suggest that a consideration for her advanced years should interfere with his public duty.

When the intelligence of the death of Arundel Vivien reached him it occasioned him much pain. As soon as he became settled at home, he evinced his sympathy for Violet by numerous acts of kindness and courtesy. Both he and his mother held in supreme contempt many of the littlenesses of society. They could dispense with them more easily, perhaps, and more gracefully, than others of humbler birth. Those two terrible words "they say," which scare so many, and which nip many a noble deed in the bud, conveyed no terrors to them—Lady

Marchmont had lived too long—Lord Marchmont not only too well, but also too wisely, to dread their power. Hence it followed that, although a bachelor, and an eligible one too, he unhesitatingly became an almost daily visitor at the Hall, where he pleasantly beguiled many hours, which might otherwise have been monotonous to Violet and Dorothy.

It had been a great disappointment to Violet that she had not been able to introduce Stanley Wyldish to Lord Marchmont. Unfortunately at the time of the short visit of the former, Lord Marchmont was away from home, and the unexpected summons to Stanley Wyldish, for so speedy a return, had prevented the meeting which had been arranged for them. Violet wished very much to bring her two friends together. She had not yet discovered that there are those, who, however well calculated they may be to form the highest opinion of, and liking for, each other,

nearly always fail to do so, when upon the equality of especial friendship with the introducer. The fairy-like castles of unanimity indulged in by the latter, generally prove fallacious; therefore the disappointment which Violet experienced upon this frustration of her plan, was in all probability less keen than it would have been on the accomplishment of her desire. The ancient proverb tells us, "of two evils, choose the least."

CHAPTER XIV.

“For, O my God, Thy creatures are so frail.”

It must be told of Lionel Harcourt, that he was no ease-loving, feather-bed soldier, and that had the sound of war again echoed, England would have found in him one of her bravest sons of battle. During his second service in India, he had been attacked by dysentery and fever. Recovering almost by a miracle, he returned to England, exchanged his regiment for the one to which he at present belonged, and when his health was sufficiently recovered, he joined it at Malta.

It was during his sojourn in England that

he became acquainted, under the circumstances which we have narrated, with Mr. and Mrs. Vivien. Despite his usual calculating self-control and caution, he had allowed his acquaintance with the latter to prove dangerous to his peace of mind, until at length, determining to escape from a thralldom over which he was fast losing all control, he proceeded to Malta, forbearing to seek an extension of his sick leave.

Upon his arrival there, he found society paying homage, with loud praise, to the beauty of Margaret Avondale. She was an heiress, and in addition to her loveliness of person, she possessed an exquisitely sweet and well-cultivated voice. Lionel Harcourt was at once attracted by her refined and delicate beauty, while the calm indifference with which she received his most pointed attentions rendered him doubly persistent in offering them. It did not take him long to decide upon the desirability of a mar-

riage with Miss Avondale. He was an ambitious man, and her wealth promised to secure to him many things which he coveted.

Moreover, his admiration for her beauty, stateliness, and dignity, was genuine. Nevertheless his decision was made with so great a degree of calmness that it needed force from the pressure of accident, to bring it into activity.

It would sometimes appear that our destiny hangs upon the most trifling circumstance. One evening Lionel Harcourt accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Avondale, their daughter, and several guests, to the theatre. At the conclusion of the entertainment, it was arranged that he should return in the same carriage with Margaret and her father. The rest of the party had already started, when Mr. Avondale, who was preparing to proceed home with his daughter and guest, suddenly meeting with a friend, whom he had

not seen for years, was induced to relinquish Margaret to the sole charge of Lionel Harcourt.

The openly evinced intention of a young Spanish nobleman to endeavour to secure the sweet prize for himself, was the force which stirred Lionel Harcourt's determination, and this unexpected opportunity for pleading his cause crowned its precipitation.

When her father vanished, Margaret leaned gently back in the carriage, and, with a slight shiver, drew her opera cloak around her.

As the carriage moved onward, the moon, every now and then, shed its soft light across her small regular features, rendering them distinctly visible. As it did so, she seemed, to her companion, like some beautiful statue, so perfect was the stillness and repose of her attitude. And yet her heart was throbbing wildly with the cruel memories which that

homeward drive brought back to her. Wrapped in them, and with her young form bathed in the pale moonlight, a voice seemed to whisper to her once again, "When the pale moon shines, Margaret, as it is shining now, let it ever remind you of how fondly I love you."

It was a fancied echo, from a night of the past, to which she was listening, and it died away as Lionel Harcourt said to her :

"Why do you look so sad, Miss Avondale? Do you not know that I am near you?"

She gave no sign or token that she heard him, other than a slight shiver, once again, as she drew the embroidered cloak more closely around her.

"Margaret," he continued, after a slight pause, "may I tell you that I love you?" At the sound of her name she started, and seemed as if making ready to spring from

the carriage. But she leant herself gently and slowly back again, and merely inclined her head towards him, almost as though she waited for and expected to hear more.

"Margaret," he whispered again, "are you listening to me? Will you let me love you? May I hope that you will love me?"

"Love whom?" was the reply, and the words rang out in a pitiful cry from her soft young voice. A deadly pallor overspread the face of Lionel Harcourt, as the question fell upon his ear, and, kneeling by her side in the moving carriage, he answered:—

"Love me, Miss Avondale, and become my wife."

After he had thus spoken, there was a profound silence, broken only by the sound of the horses' feet as they moved along, while the shadow of the carriage seemed a weird-like watch by its side, on the moon-lit road.

At length, turning somewhat suddenly towards him, she said in a voice, so low, that he hardly dared to breathe, lest he should fail to hear the words which were falling from her lips :

“Take me away from this place, Major Harcourt, and I will grant your request. I will try to love you, although it scarcely seems to me that the deepest affection of your heart is being offered to me now. Say no more to me to-night, I entreat you.”

Lionel Harcourt had for many months despised himself for having lost his self-restraint. As he bade farewell to Mrs. Vivien, he allowed a few incoherent words of sadness to escape him, when the unfeigned astonishment, which beamed from her pure eyes, recalled him instantly to self-command. As he quitted her, he determined, ere he presented himself before her again, to crush out, by absence, every sentiment but that of the most platonic feeling of friendship. Hence,

his flight to Malta then, and his resolve to marry now.

Yet it was not without considerable excitement that he had made his declaration of love to Margaret Avondale during their lonely drive ; and his amazement was unbounded when, instead of either the faintly murmured expression of pleasure, which he had hoped for, or the coldness of rejection, which he had feared, Margaret rapidly whispered her few broken sentences. But there was no time for prolonged conversation, even had he ventured to disobey her entreaty. The lights from the house, which they had nearly reached, were becoming distinctly visible.

" May I see you to-morrow ?" he asked hurriedly.

" I will write to you," she gravely replied as she alighted from the carriage.

There was a sound of merry voices and of laughter, as they entered one of the apart-

ments of the house, and joined Mrs. Avondale. Margaret was soon conversing with some one who approached her, while Lionel Harcourt retired to a distant part of the room. He was in no mood to join in the hilarity and amusement around him.

The memory of no other love asked for, and reciprocated, mocked him with a faith now dead ; but he thought of a sweet woman in a fair English home, and he mused for a moment upon the happiness which might have been granted to him, could he have found her with no other tie binding her—could he have poured forth a passionate pleading to her.

It was an ungenerous, unwise reverie. He put it from him with a sigh of hopelessness, and quickly gathered up the tangled threads of his imagination, and bound them resolutely to the reality of the present. He glanced across the room at Margaret, and continued his soliloquy, determining that he would

take her from Malta, as she had asked him. His marriage with her, together with the excitement of travelling, would, he argued, dispel the fancies which he owned to be imprudent, and which he knew deservedly marred his happiness. He did not pause to consider whether Margaret would be happier also. Neither did he doubt the infallibility of the remedy which he was choosing for his unlawful passion. He remained in his isolated position until the room was almost emptied of guests, and the last farewell had been spoken. With all his stoicism he felt it to be impossible to leave without some recognition, from Margaret, however slight, of that which had passed between them. Fortunately, one individual, more loquacious than the rest, engaged the attention of Mrs. Avondale. Seizing the opportunity, he approached Margaret, and, as he bade her good-night, asked in an anxious *sotto voce* :

“ Will you spare me a rose from your dress,

Miss Avondale, that I may carry it away with me?"

He watched her downcast face, and observed a slight trembling of her short red upper lip. There was an expression of indecision over the faultless, almost child-like, purity of her countenance, as she took the flower from one of the clusters on her dress and held it steadily between her fingers.

For a moment he thought she was about to bestow it upon him. But in another, its petals were being slowly plucked from it, one by one, until nothing remained but a mass of rose leaves in the palm of her hand.

"Not a flower," she replied, as she scattered the fragments over a china dish which stood near her, "I cannot give you a flower; but will not this do?" and she unclasped a bracelet from her slender arm, and gave it to him.

"I am grateful," he replied, "for whatever you may kindly grant me; but the rose

would have given me sweeter hope—nay, would have spoken more to me of yourself.”

As he took the offered token, it chilled him, in spite of its costliness.

“You are very tired, I fear, darling,” Mrs. Avondale began as she caressed her daughter when, at length, they were alone. “I am sorry that I allowed you to sing after our return this evening. I ought to have been more firm, but my little bird sings so sweetly, that I could well understand how much they all wished to hear her. It has tired you too much, so come, at once, to your room. Papa seems very happy at having met his old friend—does he not?”

Margaret and her mother speedily parted for the night, and, immediately afterwards, Margaret dismissed her maid with a thankful sensation of relief at finding herself alone. Extinguishing the light, she proceeded to gratify her longing to behold again the

beauty of the night, ere dawn chased it away.

It was a night so lovely, and so full of calm and holy teaching to the feverish, passionate hearts of mankind, that, to have passed it by unnoticed would have been the losing of a loving message, sent, through its beauty, from the hand of its Creator to His struggling, spirit-worn children.

As Margaret drew aside the curtains from her window, a glorious tide of moonlight filled the room. For a while the sweet peace of the midnight repose of sleeping creation exercised its soothing influence upon her. She leaned against the window and looked wistfully from it, her brain throbbing painfully with busy thoughts. Then the tears rolled in rapid succession down her cheeks, and ceased gradually, as though their pearly torrent had quenched her grief. At length she roused herself. Closing the curtains, she re-lighted the tapers, and

drawing towards her a writing-stand, she wrote the following words to Lionel Harcourt :—

“While you were speaking to me, as we drove home this evening, I had not the courage to tell you that I have once loved another. I could not become your wife without telling you this, but as I can never tell you any more than this, would it not be better for you to forget what has passed between us?”

Lionel Harcourt waited nervously until rather late the next morning, before this brief missive reached him. He replied, with a solicitation for an interview, which was granted.

Nothing could exceed, at all times, his polished and courteous bearing. Subdued and softened, as he naturally was, when the appointed interview with Mar-

garet took place, he appeared to great advantage.

"I am here, Miss Avondale," he commenced, as he drew closer to her, "to assure you how impossible it is for me ever to forget the occurrence of last evening. I do not presume to ask you any questions regarding the past. I beg only to be allowed to repeat my petition, that you will love me and promise to become my wife. Believe me, if you will trust your future with me, I will strive my utmost to make it happy. So happy, indeed, that in its happiness you will forget every sorrow which you may once have had."

He paused, for he understood Margaret well enough to know, that more than this might frighten her from him for ever. He did not fear the romance referred to in her note.

"Margaret—dear Margaret," he continued, finding that she made him no answer, "do

not refuse that, for which I am pleading. You will not?" he ejaculated, eagerly, as she timidly raised her eloquent eyes to his. "Do not speak, dearest," he went on, tenderly. "I also have had my dream, but in the love of each other, we will forget the past, and, in a new home amid new scenes, awake to perfect happiness."

He folded his arms around her as he spoke, and although her soft cheek was dyed with crimson as he pressed his lips upon it, she did not turn from him, nor were the two cold trembling hands, which he took in his, withdrawn.

Major and Mrs. Harcourt were pronounced by the world to be a remarkably happy couple, admirably well-suited to each other, and a great acquisition to the circle of society in which they moved. It is true that nothing ever ruffled the harmony of their every-day life, but for many reasons, their union was scarcely one likely to be productive of any

superabundance of conjugal felicity. Such unions, however, frequently stand the test of time, faithfully and usefully, although their texture is unmingled with the happy "gloss" and "glimmer" vouchsafed to more fortunate mortals. The youthful romance, of which the lover thought so lightly, proved to be a sterner reality than he had supposed; and Lionel Harcourt knew nothing more of his wife's secret, after they had been married a few years, than he did when she first promised him her hand.

For some time succeeding their wedding they travelled, and on coming to England they were speedily invited to Greyford Hall.

The house was full of visitors during their stay, and, consequently, Mrs. Harcourt had no opportunity of arriving at any degree of intimacy with Violet.

After the death of Arundel Vivien, both Lionel Harcourt and his wife sincerely de-

sired, by the warmth of their friendship, to be of some comfort to her. They repeatedly endeavoured to persuade her to visit them, but she steadily declined all invitations. Time had sped on without bringing any change to her resolution. She and May continued in the seclusion of Greyford Hall.

CHAPTER XV.

"I will pluck it from my bosom, tho' my heart be at the root."

"DON'T laugh," wrote Mrs. Vivien, in a long letter, to Captain Wyldish, some weeks after his visit which had ended so abruptly, "when I tell you that dear, good Miss Summerleigh is going to be married. It is all just like a story-book, and it is all going to end happily, just as story-books ought, and as I should make them if I wrote them. It seems that she had a lover, and I am afraid to say how many years ago, but it was before the death of her father, and that happened, I know, a very long time since. This lover had no money.

so they were not even allowed to be engaged. They were dreadfully broken-hearted, and were obliged to part, each vowing never to marry any one else ; and, marvel of 'marvels, they have kept their word.

“ But I must not grow incoherent, for I really have a great deal to tell you, and I am going to commence at the beginning of my story. The day before yesterday, May and I stayed in the park until it was growing dusk, and past her bed-time. When I came in I went straight to the library. I suppose I was in a meditative mood ; at any rate, I walked in very slowly and softly, and never looked up until I reached the middle of the room, when my astonishment was unbounded, on beholding a tall, strange man, standing with his back to the fireplace, his face partly hidden on something, and his arms enveloping something.

“ It was well that the decorous Stevens was not the intruder instead of myself, for I am

certain had he been, nothing could have saved him from an apoplectic fit, since that something proved to be Miss Summerleigh. I was perfectly aghast, and remained rooted to the spot of carpet upon which I stood, until the stranger suddenly raised his head, and, seeing me, relinquished Miss Summerleigh, and in a most charmingly frank, and, considering his position, wonderfully unembarrassed manner, introduced himself. The dear little woman did her best to rally, and become composed, but it was altogether too much for her, and after a vain attempt, she looked imploringly at us and left the room. The situation was awkward. Mr. Vansittart, however, proved himself to be equal to the occasion. Advancing towards me, he proceeded at once to say,

“I owe you a thousand apologies, Mrs. Vivien, for the scene you have just accidentally witnessed. Miss Summerleigh and I have been separated for many long years,

and just as you entered I had obtained her promise that she would shortly become my wife. I have, as you see, grown gray in her service,' he added, smiling, 'but you know her too well not to understand how great my happiness must be. May I trust that you will forgive that which must almost appear an unwarrantable intrusion on my part?'

"What could I say or do, my dear Captain Wyldish? Even while I congratulated him, my selfishness comprehended what a terrible grief this marriage would bring to me, and what a blank Miss Summerleigh's absence would create in my home. I find out, now, that consideration for this prevented her from confiding to me the secret of her returning lover. I leave you to imagine the long conversation which she and I held together, and how it was interspersed with smiles and tears.

"They are to be married almost imme-

diately, when Mr. Vansittart will carry back his prize to India. I confess, I went to bed sorely cast down and bewildered, but the next morning, fortunately, brought Major Harcourt, who most kindly solved some of my difficulties.

"I am to go to town, and stay with him and Mrs. Harcourt until I find some one to return here with me as companion, or something of that sort. Major Harcourt has gone to explain what nursery arrangements are required for May, after which he will return for me. So for the present we shall be safe with such kind friends, and I hope that we may meet you, as I know you are often in town. Major Harcourt will help me to settle how things are to go on during my absence. I really cannot think what I should have done without him, and how I am to manage when I return, without dear, darling Miss Summerleigh, I cannot tell. The wedding is to take

place immediately. Mr. Vansittart's relations live close to Miss Summerleigh's own house in Devonshire, from whence the wedding will take place. It is needless to say that I could not be present at the ceremony."

There was not much else in the letter, and if there had been it would have found little chance of being attended to. There was no amusement to Stanley Wyldish in the description given him of the library scene—no interest for the lovers—no compassion for the writer in the loss she would so soon sustain of the society of her friend. All was swallowed up, in one concentrated feeling of jealousy.

Mrs. Vivien, he thought bitterly, had found another to help her, and was cheerfully arranging to leave the home which he had striven so hard to retain for her. Until now, she had strenuously opposed every suggestion that both he and Miss Summerleigh had made for her to do so.

Her health had often demanded a change of air, but no persuasion hitherto could induce her to take it. Now, she was leaving Greyford Hall suddenly, and at the very time when she must have known that he could have gone to assist her in any difficulty, but she was relieved from her perplexities at once—and by whom?—by the very man whom he wished to keep from her. He forgot the suddenness of the affair and his utter inability, being a bachelor, to receive a lady and tiny child as guests, while he overlooked the natural anxiety, which Violet would necessarily feel, to release her friend as speedily as possible from the duties at Greyford Hall, so that the bridal arrangements might not be impeded. He forgot to be just, and, then and there, he wilfully carved out untold sorrow for himself and for her.

Jealousy was, without doubt, one of his besetting sins. It had the power of completely

transforming him; and jealousy of Lionel Harcourt was of long duration.

He stood erect and motionless, as he read, transfixed with anger.

"Hallo, Wyldish," was the unexpected greeting which roused him, "what are you doing, standing there, and looking as black as thunder, with that letter in your hand? Duns, again, I suppose? Never mind, burn it, old man, and pitch the bailiffs out of the window, if they appear; but you might take some sort of notice of a fellow, though, when he looks in upon you."

"All right, Dallingcourt, don't bother, there's a good fellow. Temper is no name for the mood I am in now."

"What, worse than usual? Well! you must be cheerful. However, I only want to know whether you will come round and dine with us to-night. We intend going to the theatre afterwards, so you may as well come."

Half an hour earlier, and this invitation would have shared the fate of many similar ones, and would have been refused. There was a slight hesitation on the part of Stanley Wyldish, before he replied, and then it was warmly accepted.

"Go?—of course I'll go," he muttered to himself, as George Dallingcourt departed. "Fool that I have been to waste so much time upon a woman who never has cared for me, and who never will. By this time Harcourt has, doubtless, escorted her to town with much greater care than I could. Of course, this precious letter has been as long as possible on the road. Sent to my quarters; and my idiot of a servant was drunk as usual, I could swear, and neglected to post it, or it would have been here the day before yesterday."

Upon this he re-opened the missive, which had unwittingly brought him such woe, and carefully reconsidered its contents. "Why

on earth," he continued, waxing more and more wrathful, "was I not sent for, I should like to know? Why could not one of those everlasting telegrams have come, as usual, when anything is the matter? The entire thing has been arranged for a long time, I firmly believe. I have been a great ass, and doubtless that scoundrel Harcourt is laughing at me now, in his sleeve. I have no notion of his town address, for Mrs. Vivien, of course, has not thought proper to mention it. They all know, however, where I am to be found. So I am to wait, I suppose, until I am wanted, and then I may be fetched, if it happens to suit them.

"It is all over with me now. I'll go in heavily for the Dallingcourt. Better suited to me, perhaps, and the game will be easy enough to win in that quarter."

CHAPTER XVI.

"That has to-day its sunny side."

STANLEY WYLDISH judged rashly when he predicted, that Violet had arrived in town before her letter, announcing the intended marriage of Dorothy Summerleigh, reached him.

It was nevertheless, a right conclusion.

Lionel Harcourt speedily returned to Greyford Hall, and Violet, with May and Susanne, had accompanied him on the following day to Mrs. Harcourt.

Dorothy Summerleigh, with her habitual unselfishness, had wished that this should be

so. She had long desired that Violet should experience the benefit of fresh scenes. She knew, also, that to linger over a parting is to prolong its pain, and to give much unnecessary sharpness to its sting. The same delicacy of feeling, which had made her refrain from imparting to Violet the knowledge of the return of Mr. Vansittart to England, caused her now to shrink from betraying any outward token of her newly-found happiness.

Violet appreciated the tender thoughtfulness of her friend, while she endeavoured to enter with cheerfulness into the prospects of the future, which had so unexpectedly arisen for her.

But it was a difficult part for each of them to sustain. The more so, because all the arrangements for Violet's own marriage had been superintended by Dorothy, and it was impossible for either of them to forget, how short-lived had been the fair splendour

of the anticipated happiness which then shone.

Mr. Vansittart had but a short time to remain in England, and therefore the wedding could not be delayed : but between her love for him, and her affection for Violet, the heart of poor Dorothy was almost torn asunder. However, she took courage to leave Violet, from the thought that each day found her stronger and more hopeful, while at the same 'time she was more engrossed with little May. They might safely, she hoped, be left to each other, in the security of their pretty home.

Major and Mrs. Harcourt soon discovered that, with the exception of an occasional walk, or drive in the park, Violet firmly refused all gaiety and amusement. So the time passed without excitement ; and a week had elapsed since she and her child had taken up their abode with them.

But although quiet to them, it had been

unquiet and stormy to Stanley Wyldish, who had never been sufficiently composed to answer her unfortunate letter. He had, in fact, spent the greater portion of the time in trying to forget her by making desperate love to Inah Dallingcourt.

Twice, within the last few years, the wheel of fortune had brought him within the sphere of her blandishments. The knowledge, which he had gained by former experience, had he been less heedless and less absorbed by an imaginary grievance, would have caused him to listen to the trumpet-call of caution, now so loudly sounding.

The rumour which had disturbed Basil Cranmore had been afloat some time. It rose up, and died away, as the impulse of one of the principal actors gave or withheld cause. But it was difficult to realize whether it had any foundation.

In spite of all the skilled endeavours of

the fair besieger, the fortress long held out, and appeared impregnable.

Now, however, one, whom she considered an enemy, had unknowingly thrown in her way an opportunity, of which she was not slow to take advantage. It was of little consequence to her, for what reason the stronghold surrendered, so long as it yielded at last. The besieged and besieger had been engaged in something more serious than an ordinary flirtation during the stay of Stanley Wyldish in Malta. How, or why, the affair ended, caused considerable speculation at the time, and curiosity was now revived with unabated vigour.

Inah was at this time in London, visiting Mr. and Mrs. Lennox, her aunt and uncle.

It was a piece of good fortune, which she had not anticipated, that Stanley Wyldish would remain in town during so great a portion of her stay. This week, therefore, had

been to her one of especial enjoyment and pleasure. It had brought opportunities and meetings, of which she had often dreamed, and even devised, when at home ; but which had, as often, been frustrated, by either the engagements of Stanley Wyldish, his "absence," or by that most provoking, because unanswerable, plea of "on duty." Who has soldier friends and does not hate the very sound of it ? Notwithstanding, it was rather the shadow of excitement than the substance of happiness which she held within her grasp, and she liked him too well not to realize this.

No usurper ever held a more uncertain, unenviable hold over the hearts of the people, than she did over the man who seemed desirous to throw himself at her feet. No sceptre was ever grasped more eagerly, and no sway was ever more uncertain.

But of rest and unrest, of sunshine and

cloud, of good to one and evil to another, the week recked not.

Hurrying on, it left its scars upon some of the children of earth, while it bestowed the balm of its healing power upon others.

Ere this fragment of time, which had been fraught with such different interests to those of whom we are telling, had drifted into the past, Dorothy Summerleigh was married.

There are some whose nature adversity cannot warp, and prosperity cannot sully. If she bent before the one, it was only as some floweret droops with the heaviness of the moisture, which renews its vigour and beauty, to raise its head anew and shed a sweeter and more powerful fragrance around. But if she sunned herself in the other, it widened the halo of her contentment and loving deeds, while it enlarged, with its warmth, the unselfishness of her already unselfish disposition.

Does the reader know the line of railway

from Exeter to Bideford? It is not so picturesque, perhaps, as that from Exeter to Plymouth, where we get a peep at Dawlish, with its cliffs and sea, and also of thickly-wooded Ivybridge: but it is sufficiently interesting to repay the traveller for its want of speed.

Passing Barnstaple and Instow, we alight at Bideford, exchange the train for our carriage, and, crossing the quaint old bridge, ascend the steep street of the town.

Driving through it, we proceed for some miles through lanes, the length of which justifies their notoriety. They are so beautiful, with their North-Devon luxuriance at one point, and wildness at another, that we are sorry they should bring with their self-justification the "turning," which exemplifies the truth of the old proverb.

Sweet North Devon! with its Clovelly looking as though the trees, by which it is surrounded, are holding it tenderly in their

arms, fearful lest it should slip away from them altogether, and be lost in the wide-spreading ocean which flows around it. Clovelly! immortalized in story, and loved by all, who appreciate nature, for its unrivalled beauty—a beauty so exquisite that, did its county possess no other loveliness, it would thereby be world-renowned.

But we, who know you well, North Devon, can sing of other glories that are yours—can tell of many a wonder—of your Ilfracombe—of your rocky coast—of your pebble ridge—of your hill and dale; and as the pure, fresh air is blowing over us, after the heat and noise of the train, we could almost wish that your lanes possessed “no turnings,” and that our steeds would carry us “on for ever.”

We have already passed two villages—hidden from us as soon as we had passed them, by the rising ground—and now we are nearing a third. As we catch the first glimpse

of it, we rouse ourselves from the pleasurable listlessness, with which we have been enjoying the several delights of our evening drive, and begin to feel important.

Our coachman, too, is already more imposingly erect, and our pace is considerably quickened. But we are somewhat premature. We soon discover that we are asserting ourselves and our dignity, only to the twittering birds and green hedgerows. The village stands higher than the road we are pursuing, and we are farther from it than we had imagined. Nevertheless, we are rapidly approaching closer and closer, and there are unmistakable signs of a great excitement. We have come upon a few picturesque outlying cottages. Each one, as we drive past, pours forth its inmates, from grandsire to infant. We are evidently part of a great and universal interest, which has not yet reached its culminating point. Something more important than ourselves is clearly

looked for. Our vanity is not hurt thereby; indeed, we feel almost apologetic, as we see them hastening along their garden-paths, and know that we shall disappoint them, and that their patient watching must remain unrewarded until the arrival of another train. As we press onward, we overtake troops of boys and girls, carrying in their hands boughs of trees and baskets of flowers. They stop as they hear the sound of carriage-wheels, and their rosy faces wear the same look of eager curiosity. They are sturdy-limbed, healthy-looking children, and as they turn to drop their curtseys, we notice many a pretty, rich-complexioned Devonshire face peeping from under the girls' sun-bonnets.

At length we see the spire of the village church, and, by-and-by, the village itself to which we are bound.

At its entrance we pass under a triumphal arch, and we are not slow to guess whom its erection is intended to honour. Still

every face is turned to us with the same expectant expression. Only our own increasing excitement sustains us, and prevents us from becoming nearly as sorry for ourselves as for others, so embarrassed are we beginning to feel at this prolonged and continued scrutiny.

Passing on, we perceive knots of villagers grouped around the large tree which occupies the centre of the village-green, and which faces the church and the school-house. There is a happy stir and bustle over all. Some are busy with strong hand and arm, some with tongue and eye only ; but all are helping in, or watching the completion of, the decorations of the church-gate and porch.

We are glad, at last, to recognize the familiar face of the vicar, and with him our old friend Mr. Matingley, who had, as we now perceive, stolen a march upon us. But, although they greet us quickly, we have yet had time to scan it all ; the gala appearance

of village and villagers ; the merriment of the younger faces, the energy of the elder ones. Their vicar, standing in the midst of them, tall and commanding, dressed in his old-fashioned swallow-tailed coat, directed their various operations, while by his side stood Mr. Matingley, with hammer and nails in his hands, as busy as the rest. Having alighted and refreshed ourselves at the Vicarage, we commenced to earn golden opinions for ourselves, in the honest hearts around us, by joining zealously in their work.

Inside the church skilful hands had been equally industrious. White flowers were twined gracefully on the chancel screen—white flowers were placed with reverential care upon the altar.

At length all were glad at the success of a completed toil. The setting sun shone gloriously, while the cheery “good-night” passed from mouth to mouth.

Upon the following morning the sun rose

as gloriously as it had set. Ere it was many hours old we were again within the old church walls.

A respectful silence prevailed without, while within a holy rite was making Dorothy Summerleigh and Horace Vansittart one for life. There is a tremulous faltering in the voice of the bride, when, at length, it is heard ; but the utterance of the bridegroom is full and strong, as though he were thankful to find some vent, in those few earnest words of the service, for the full tide of happiness which almost overpowers him. At last they, who had scarcely dared to indulge in the hope of meeting again upon earth, left the altar "man and wife." Groups of kindly faces and outstretched hands were waiting to greet them, while full hearts petitioned for a blessing on the newly-wedded pair. The only drop of pain in their cup of content was that which Dorothy experienced at leaving Violet.

This wedding-day was a sore tax upon the spirits and cheerfulness of Violet, who could not make herself as glad as she desired, and as she felt that she ought to be, at the happiness of her friend. Moreover, she was vexed with herself because she allowed the remembrance of what their happiness cost her to mingle with her sympathy for the two faithful hearts made happy at last.

“The foolish confusions of innocent sorrow” distressed her.

Death and absence, each in turn, were ordained to take a loved one from her. Riven hearts cannot always turn from earth, and tear-laden souls may not ever soar heavenward. Violet experienced this. While Arundel rested in the blissful home of Paradise, and Dorothy Vansittart in the stronghold of the heart of her husband, choking sobs escaped from Violet as she tried to thank God that it was so.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I cannot soar into the heights you show."

THE sun was doing its best to remind the devotees of fashion that they had reached the summit of their dissipation, and to suggest to them longings for sea breezes and green fields. But its sultry warnings remained disregarded. In the list of departures from town not one exodus could be found important enough to awaken attention.

Day after day the weather continued unusually oppressive, and upon one of the warmest mornings, two ladies in listless attitude, with books and work thrown aside, were endeavouring to catch what little breeze

they could from an open shaded window. They had, apparently, thought it almost too warm even for conversation, and their pretty chirrup of girlish voices had ceased for some minutes. The silence, however, was soon broken.

"I liked that Mr. Basil Cranmore, to whom I was introduced last night," began Nellie Lennox, the younger, and, at first sight, the least attractive of the two. "I thought he looked dreadfully grave and serious, but I soon discovered he was not so. He really is particularly nice. I do not think he approved of you though, Inah, for I saw him look at you, once or twice, as severely as the laws of politeness, when stretched to their utmost limits, would permit. Do you know anything about him? or have you ever met him before?"

Thus interrogated, Inah Dallingcourt dropped her chatelaine, with the trinkets of which she had been playing, and regarded her

companion with a slight degree of languid attention. Her appearance was almost as dazzling as the bright sunshine without. Emeralds and diamonds of large size flashed from her white fingers as she rested them idly in her lap, while the same brilliant gems shone from a locket at her throat. Her dress, which combined marvellous shades of blue and green, in its fanciful arrangement, enhanced the brilliancy both of her complexion and of her bright yellow hair.

Inah Dallingcourt was an unscrupulous flirt, and the large amount of natural attractions which she possessed enabled her to carry on her work of devastation over the hearts of the weak and the unwary. She had achieved a great reputation for beauty—a reputation which she spared no pains to keep. In this she succeeded, although the eight and twentieth summer, which she had now reached, had ripened somewhat too deeply the bloom on her cheek, and had rounded, a little too

much for girlish beauty, her magnificently white shoulders and arms.

In conjunction with her charms of face and form, her high spirits and animation gained for her, always, a host of admirers. One after another these reckless moths singed and scorched themselves in the fire, which was lighted at her shrine, the flame of which, they persuaded themselves for a time, was that of a real, true, and imperishable passion. One after another they were set at liberty as there appeared in sight a fresh worshipper, who gave promise, perhaps, of richer spoil, at any rate of fresh excitement to the fair priestess.

The disappointed ones took flight, but speedily recovered themselves in gentler and purer atmospheres, while each tide of season, as it came, rolled a wave of fresh victims to her feet, and the months, as they sped by, left new slaves bound to her chariot wheels.

They, who were thus overthrown and fettered, were no mean legion. True it is

that sometimes recruits and raw material might be found in the defeated lines, but, for the most part, they had served long under the banner of Cupid, and had been scarred and wounded in many an amorous encounter. Whatever their standing, however, all had as yet contrived to break through the entanglements which Inah wove around them, while the coveted bourne of the hymeneal altar seemed as far from her now, as when she was first launched upon society some nine years previously. She was a striking contrast, in appearance and character, to her cousin, Nellie Lennox, the simply-dressed, quiet, intelligent-looking girl whose question she thus answered.

“My dear child, how can I tell? Mr. Cranmore is a little man. I never look at little men unless I am obliged to do so, and then I make a point of forgetting all about them immediately afterwards. I am quite prepared to believe all you may tell me about

him, and to have faith in your report of his charming qualities. As a proof of this, I will patronize him, if you particularly wish it, and allow him to have the honour of being introduced to me at the next opportunity. He, being a dark man, will admire fair women, to a certainty, and therefore will be dying to know me."

"I am not so sure of that," was the prompt reply. "I saw enough of him to ascertain that he is altogether the wrong sort of man to be patronized. Besides, I tell you, he looked volumes of disapproval at the tremendous flirtation in which you were engaged."

"The grapes were very sour, perhaps, dear. They always make people wonderfully righteous, you know, while they are being eaten."

Nellie smiled mischievously as she said, "Try your powers if you like, sweet cousin; but remember that I prophesy a defeat."

“ This new friend of yours is stupendously endowed, Nellie, according to your estimation ; but do not bore me quite to death this hot morning, whatever his good points may be. Take my advice, in return for your prediction, and do not advocate either him or his principles until you know whether he is the eldest son or not. He and his attributes are worth nothing, if he is only a second, or worse than nothing if a dreadful third. Of all things, dear little Nellie, eschew a younger son.”

“ You are severe this morning,” Nellie returned, merrily, “ upon the unfortunates who happen to miss the entail. I think, however, that they are as well worth talking to as some of those elder scions of noble houses, upon whom you fasten what little faith their flattery and flirtation have left in you. I know one, a tall one—ever such a tall one,” she went on, with increasing merriment of manner, standing on tip-toe as she spoke, and

trying to reach as high in the air with her hand as his imaginary head might be supposed to reach, "and I would not give much for him, good-looking, broad-shouldered, tall, heir-apparent though he be. A knight of yours I know you dub him; but if ever there was a recreant knight he is one. I am not generally horsey in my expressions, but I must say, that I call him a regular 'jibber.'"

The last word was accompanied by an emphatic shake of the head, as though the speaker had somewhat exhausted her eloquence.

Inah winced a little, but, without replying, sang, in a rich voice and with a mock-sentimental air, a few words from the well-known ballad, "Strangers Yet,"

"Shall we never fairly stand,
Soul to soul, as hand to hand?"

and then, ceasing abruptly, she exclaimed,

"Oh, Nellie! Nellie! you romantic juve-

nile. Do you think nowadays that men wear their feelings pinned upon their coat sleeves, that all may read who choose, or that such a thing as a passion, absorbing enough for one woman, occupies any one man to the exclusion of all others? And are you roaming through the world dreaming that a storming Sir Lancelot will withstand all maidens, however beauteous, for your sweet sake, and keep only your image in his heart, no matter how many little Elaines shut themselves up, and sing themselves to death, for love of him? The heroine of such a romance would be little short of a martyr; for, of course, if he allowed no one else to cross his vision, you could not with any conscience be less scrupulous. Oh, dear! I suppose you would like to have one pair of spectacles for both, through which you could only see each other, and without which you would be perfectly blind. Put them on yourself first, and look lovingly at him; then lend them to him, to repeat the

same charming experiment on you. What an interesting world of one's own it would be under such circumstances. Connubial bliss—absorbed in each other. 'Hand to hand,' and 'soul to soul,' with a vengeance. Do you expect Captain Wyldish to have ears and eyes for none but me?"

"If I did, I should be terribly disappointed," was the decided reply of Nellie; and then she added, thoughtfully, "Do you know, Inah, that I sometimes fancy you care more for him, than you have ever done for any one else. I believe, also, that when you first knew him in Malta, you were as romantic as you suppose me to be now. He must be very changed since then; but, although it is the fashion to talk of him as awfully wild, and always in mad spirits, I have often seen a wretchedly anxious expression come over his face. It makes me feel very sorry when I see it; and I have noticed it more since his friend, Mr. Vivien, died. I should be

very jealous of Mrs. Vivien, if I were you, Inah."

"Nonsense, child," retorted Inah, scornfully. "She is the feeblest butterfly in existence. She has a baby, too! and papa says she is, very likely, soon to be turned out of her property."

"Oh! I do hope not," Nellie cried warmly. "I have always heard that she is so nice, and that she devotedly loved her husband. What a cruel thing it would be for her to have more sorrow. I hardly know why, but I always feel that I should like to know her."

"Form a crusade then, and visit this distressed widow," suggested Inah. "You might try, on your way, to reform recreant knights, as you call them, whose number, judged by your standard, is legion."

"I do not care an atom for your derision, Inah! I only wish that I could help those who suffer. I have no ambition to attack your knights, but I should like of all things

to form a crusade against falseness, and untruth of every description. I often wish there was some way of testing whether people be true or false, in the same sure manner as there is of testing gold and silver."

"How very absurd you are this morning, Nellie. Fancy having one's particular friends pitched on their heads, or submitted to some frightful bodily torture, just for the selfish gratification of finding out whether they tell fibs or not. What a barbarous notion! Why they might emerge with a black eye, or some other horrible disfigurement, and not be able to show themselves for ever so long. You had much better leave everything as it is, and if your friends flatter you to your face, at one instant, and, having left you, abuse you at another, what does it matter so long as they were agreeable in your presence? I have no sympathy with your Quixotic ideas."

"Nevertheless I am bent on retaining them," Nellie eagerly interposed. "I must

believe thoroughly in the sincerity of my friends, or I cannot care for them."

"If you are wise," exclaimed Inah, "you would leave their sincerity to take care of itself; and if a man vows eternal devotion to you, believe him, and make him useful to you for his pains. Most likely his eternal devotion will prove but a very temporary and fleeting one, which will give you the opportunity of exchanging it for another. He will have danced just as well, sang just as well, amused you just as much, chosen as exquisite bouquets, and perfectly fitting gloves for you. He will have admired as enthusiastically everything belonging to you, from the tip of your dog's nose to the heels of your boots, as if he were constancy itself personified, and as though that state of things were going to last for ever. How stupid it would be to have everybody saying exactly what they mean, without one pleasing little white fib, to relieve the monotony of

their conversation. Bare facts would, I am convinced, bring me speedily to an untimely end."

"How provoking you are, Inah. You know I was not speaking of those wretched things called fibs, although, for the matter of that, I would have them all swept away and risk the stupidity which might ensue. Words ought to be words, and to mean what they are intended, and people ought to use them properly. I think, in your heart you agree with me, but you will not own it."

"Indeed, I do not," replied Inah, impatiently; "and, if your ideas were to be carried out, I think Victoria crosses ought to be awarded to the man or woman who should be found brave enough to probe beneath and disturb the surface of things around them."

"Then order the crosses immediately," Nellie said, laughing heartily; "for I am burning to destroy some of them. I have

always hated them for their hollowness, and now that I have nearly reached the end of my second season, I hate them still more."

Inah glanced kindly at her cousin as she replied, "Yet you have been a success, you little Puritan, with your childish face, and your preaching. But here comes something more interesting than this prosy conversation of ours. See, here are piles of art from Bond Street — finery enough to sink an iron-clad."

The two girls turned simultaneously to examine the gorgeous handiwork brought for their inspection, and Nellie Lennox soon, for a time, forgot her zeal against the treachery of the world, and her desire for its reform.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"A jealousy so strong that judgment cannot cure."

"WHAT are all the men turning round to look at?" exclaimed Inah Dallingcourt, one morning shortly succeeding that on which the foregoing conversation had taken place. She was seated upon a chair, under one of the shadiest trees in the park, and attended by Stanley Wyldish.

"It is perfectly preposterous of them to stare in that manner," she continued. "I expected to see some new and startling beauty, but, after all, they are only looking at that girl in deep mourning, who, in my opinion, has nothing really attractive about her, with

the exception of her feet, which are certainly remarkably small and well shaped. She walks well, too, I admit. The man who accompanies her has much more to recommend him to notice. But the epidemic of staring at her seems likely to prove fatal to him, for he has never taken his eyes from off her face all the time I have been watching them. Some good Samaritan really ought to warn him that, at least, he will get a stiff neck if he bends it so low, and keeps it in one position so long. Look, Captain Wyldish!"

He turned, as if mechanically, at her command, and saw Violet Vivien and Major Harcourt walking slowly past, and apparently engaged in a conversation too absorbing to allow either of them to notice the scene around them.

They formed a striking contrast to the surrounding idlers. She, with her sad calm face, moving gracefully by the side of Lionel

Harcourt, serenely unconscious of the admiration which she was exciting ; while he, with his grave protective bearing, seemed as though he were trying to shield her, if possible, from being seen by any save himself. As Stanley Wyldish beheld them, he marked all these details with an emotion which nearly maddened him. He knew that Violet was at the Harcourts'. Of this he had angrily assured himself, many times, even before his conviction was confirmed by the receipt of a note from her, telling of her arrival.

This note contained her address, and therefore was calculated to remove one of his reasons for dissatisfaction. Unhappily, however, it conveyed no expression of desire to see him, and it produced therefore no conciliating effect. This omission was sufficiently explained by the regimental direction which it bore, had he chosen to consider and understand it. But he felt now that with all his anger he had but faintly realized what had

happened. He had never dreamed of seeing her thus.

"Well, Captain Wyldish, how much longer am I to wait before you speak?" ejaculated Inah Dallingcourt, impatiently. "No complexion, has she?" and the radiant beauty glanced at him with conscious complacency, as she made her inquiry.

"No—none—whatever."

The three words were uttered by him separately and distinctly, with a pause between each.

"No—none—whatever!" cried her merry mocking voice, as it quickly repeated them. "Is that all you have to say, Captain Wyldish? You, who are generally so critical and fastidious about beauty. You are not at all amusing this morning. I should have found my Cousin Nellie less slow."

And Inah's red lips curled disdainfully, while her eyelids drooped with scorn. She had not heard the grating of his strong teeth

as they were firmly set against each other before he had spoken ; neither had she observed the fierce and sudden clenching of his hands, as though they were fastening with deadly grip upon the throat of an enemy in mortal strife. But, she felt instantly, as women always do feel, that she had ceased to engross the whole of his attention. Consequently she became restless, and proposed that they should join Mrs. Lennox and Nellie, who were only a few chairs from them.

This suggestion roused him from the reverie into which he had fallen. The fear of meeting those who had just passed awoke him from his lethargy. He, who had never yet quailed before the face of living creature, experienced now a cowardly dread of encountering those two who had just passed by. He bent over the speaker, and whispered persuasively :

“ Do not go yet, Miss Dallingcourt. I so

seldom have the opportunity of talking to you alone. I beg you ten thousand pardons for my absence of mind. I scarcely saw the lady whom you mentioned. A man passed by at the time, with whom I had a row some months ago, and it rekindled my vengeance to see him again. Will you accept my apology? Nothing but this would have prevented me from obeying your injunctions."

He looked at the handsome face, which was turned towards him. It was even handsomer than usual, with its betrayal of undisguised pleasure at his words, and as he remarked it, he continued recklessly :

"Do not go yet. Mrs. and Miss Lennox are perfectly comfortable and contented, I assure you ; and the morning is much too lovely to be spent indoors."

Inah Dallingcourt gave signs of irresolution, which he was quick to perceive, and following up his advantage, he continued :—

"I implore you not to be so cruel. My existence is miserable enough, do not make it more so, but rather give it the happiness which you alone can bestow."

It seemed to him that the words fell from his lips involuntarily, and that he had no power to stay them. The answer which awaited him, speedily revealed the mad folly of which he had been guilty.

"Then you shall have no more misery to complain of. Now that you have told me this, I feel happier than I have been since you upbraided me so cruelly, long ago, for having stolen between you and your honour, in making you untrue to one whom you had vowed to love. You left Malta soon after that, and without seeing me again. I did not know who was the object of your adoration, but she must have been there also, and my only consolation was the conjecture, that in leaving the place, you had left her also, and, therefore, had given us both up."

There was a change in the voice of Stanley Wyldish, as he said in reply :—

“Those were my boyish days; and my first love taught me my first lesson of the ease with which women can forget. I believe she was married shortly afterwards to a Spanish nobleman, but after all, I remembered her more tenderly than she did me, for I could not make up my mind to inquire particulars. In all probability she has been blissfully wandering with her husband through his orange groves ever since. Altogether, it was not flattering to my vanity, although it saved me from the pangs of remorse.”

A shadow of discontent swept over the countenance of the listener, as she answered reproachfully :—

“You had none, then, for any one else. You had given us *both* up, you know——” and she finished the sentence with her eyes.

“There is nothing to be given up now,”

murmured Stanley Wyldish hastily. "All to be gained."

He had scarcely uttered this protestation, when Nellie Lennox joined them. There was a sort of tacitly acknowledged friendship between her and Stanley Wyldish, who admired her straightforward, unconventional manners, while he was amused with her fresh, animated remarks upon all that she noticed, and he often found himself holding long conversations with her, almost as confidentially as though he were her brother.

"I am very sorry to interrupt you," she began upon this occasion, "but mamma insisted, so there was no help for it. She wishes me to tell you, Inah, that she is ready to go home now. Are you not nearly baked, Captain Wyldish? We are all insane, I think, to waste our time looking at the same people morning after morning, and fancying ourselves amused by them. We have seen everybody so often now, that I declare I

begin to think those whom I at first considered pretty, have grown quite ugly, and the dresses, about which I once raved, are perfectly hideous. Mamma and I have been fortunate this morning, however, so I suppose I ought not to complain. We have seen one most charming-looking person dressed in black. I was dreadfully disappointed that she did not come back again. You cannot imagine how different she looked to all these gorgeously got-up people. I have done nothing but think of her sweet face ever since she passed. Did either of you see her?"

Stanley Wyldish made no reply, but Inah replied with animation,

"Yes; I saw her, and did my best to point her out to Captain Wyldish. She was not sufficiently attractive, however, to be honoured by a passing criticism from him, and I confess that I think he was wise, for I failed to discover anything beautiful about

her. Men are very like sheep, and as one stared at her, I suppose the rest thought it the right thing for them to do."

Stanley Wyldish laughed when Inah finished speaking, and, as he laughed, hated himself for his apostasy in all things which concerned Violet. For a moment he repented, asking himself why he had not spoken to the woman whose interests had been left in his charge, and why he was almost forswearing all knowledge of her as he listened to this public discussion of her beauty, as though she were unknown to him. But the feeling of repentance lasted but for a moment. The insanity of jealousy resumed its sway, as the suspicion recurred to him, that she had intentionally overthrown his assistance.

There is a bitter, mocking laugh, to which it is, if possible, more painful to listen, than to the wail of woe : and with such an one Stanley Wyldish answered Inah Dallingcourt.

"It is fortunate," he said, "that I did not

form one of the flock. Had it been so, Miss Dallingcourt, I should have incurred your condemnation for want of individuality, while your cousin, I fear, would have had a decided majority against her opinion upon the charms of this fair lady, whom she admires so much."

Step by step he was receding from his habitual custom of thought, with regard to Violet, and he stifled, as best he could, the warnings of his conscience and better judgment.

The party reached Mrs. Lennox as he concluded his remark, and there was little opportunity for conversation as he accompanied the three ladies to their carriage.

"Shall we see you to-night at Mrs. Beresford's dance?" asked Mrs. Lennox, as he was taking his leave.

"Without doubt," he replied; and he accompanied the answer with an expressive smile at Inah Dallingcourt.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Because things seen are mightier than things heard."

AFTER the carriage, which contained Mrs. Lennox, her daughter, and Inah Dallingcourt, had disappeared, Stanley Wyldish paused for a few seconds, half meditating a return to the park, and gazed towards the direction which Violet Vivien and Lionel Harcourt had taken. Then he impetuously strode in the opposite way.

His better genius prompted him to follow them, and, if possible, to meet Violet, and thus gather from her some particulars of her present and future arrangements. He knew that it would be the right and

proper course to adopt ; but abandoning the resolution, and again retrograding into the gloomy darkness of unjust doubt and groundless annoyance, he turned impatiently away.

Violet little dreamed that Stanley Wyldish had seen her. She was not aware even that he was in town, and Lionel Harcourt had no inclination either to inquire for him, or to speak of him to her, being as ready as Inah Dallingcourt to make the most of any opportunity that might arrive. Yet the desired victory was of a different character, since with Inah Dallingcourt the struggle was for a total surrender, while with Lionel Harcourt it was for a breach, which would admit him as an allied power.

The unusual silence of Stanley Wyldish caused Violet much astonishment.

Heretofore, he had shown himself so ready upon every emergency to give her his aid and sympathy, that she could not now understand his apparent indifference to such

important changes as must necessarily follow upon the marriage of Dorothy Summerleigh, and her own absence from Greyford Hall. She had no misgivings, however, with regard to him. Her confidence and trust were absolute. The second note, therefore, which she sent to him, was despatched with the full belief that the knowledge of her safety would be a relief to him. When this, also, remained unanswered, she became anxious, although her anxiety was not for herself. That he could be thinking unkindly of her, or supposing that she was unmindful of his goodness to her, was an impossibility too great for her to conceive. Besides which, she was extremely sensitive upon the point of having already proved a severe tax upon his time and patience. She resolved, therefore, to wait patiently for the unravelling of that which was at present shrouded in mystery.

Not many hours after Stanley Wyldish strode fast and furiously from her whom his

perversity had made him determine to avoid, Nellie Lennox was enthusiastically admiring the toilette of Inah Dallingcourt for the dance, of which Mrs. Lennox had spoken, as they left the park.

"How magnificent you look to-night, Inah," was her first exclamation upon gaining admittance to her cousin's room. "Perfectly bewildering," she went on, walking around Inah, and utterly regardless, in the warmth of her admiration, of her own elaborate attire. "Poor Captain Wyldish, and poor Captain Evans! They are both doomed to be hopelessly enslaved for ever, unless some intervening mercy keeps them at home this evening. Seriously, Inah, I never saw you looking better. You are really lovely. You will have to be careful, though, for you have a difficult pair to manage to-night. Captain Evans will be furious, and transparently jealous; Captain Wyldish lofty, and supremely relinquishing. Oh! I see it all, and

yourself too proud to bring the lofty one down, until it be too late. Take care, Inah, there is danger lurking somewhere. I do not exactly know where, although I think that all is not right and smooth with Captain Wyldish. Once away, you might as well think of tempting the swallow back when flying south, as to dream of re-capturing your tall Captain Wyldish if he again takes wing. So again I say, take care, Inah, and condescend to listen to the warning of so small a personage as myself."

Inah glanced affectionately at her warm-hearted little admirer.

"It is all right, dear," she replied, with a smile of satisfaction and a slight shrug of her white shoulders. "I have driven a team many times, and may safely be trusted with this pair, which you consider so dangerous."

"I have been told that it is quite as difficult to manage a pair, perfectly, as anything

else," returned Nellie, "therefore look well about you, for I expect that you will find that one will do all the work, and the other, if you allow it, none at all. I should not like to undertake such a handful as this same Captain Stanley Wyldish, even if I were as beautiful as you, Inah," she rattled on. "He always looks to me like some big volcano, ready to send out fire at any moment. I half believe that there is some tremendous secret about him—some hidden mystery. He cannot surely have murdered any one, or done anything very desperate—shot a man in a duel, or horsewhipped one to death. Anyhow, he is the most perplexing compound of frankness and reserve, devotion and negligence, that I ever, in my small experience, heard of—and yet one cannot help liking him; he is so charming with it all."

Inah listened complacently to Nellie's chattering, with the confidence which the conversation of the morning had inspired her.

She did not appear to be in so talkative a mood as Nellie, and she paused, meditatively, before she said :

“Captain Wyldish would think rather more of himself than he does already, if he could have heard your burst of eloquence, Nellie. However, we must go now. The carriage was ordered for half-past ten, and we are already late. We have rather a long drive before us, but you must console yourself with the knowledge that you will have an opportunity, when it is over, to continue your scrutiny of the object of your solicitude.”

The hope, however, proved to be a false one. Reception rooms and ball-room were alike crowded, but he was nowhere to be seen.

The light which had beamed in the morning was reflected in the lustre of Inah's beauty that night. It was a light which she deemed had grown steady at last, and which

this evening would strengthen and increase. But it had flared up with sudden brilliancy, and the absence of him, from whom it had come, seemed to portend that it had as suddenly died out.

But whatever were Inah's misgivings, or whatever she endured, she was not one to play the part of a love-stricken, wobegone damsel. Therefore she added considerably to the perplexities of Nellie's speculations upon human nature, by preserving a radiantly animated appearance, and also by amusing herself as lightly and easily with the many, as though the missing one had no especial hold upon her.

When they returned home, Inah told Nellie that she was too tired for conversation, and, as Mrs. Lennox appeared to have forgotten that they expected to meet Stanley Wyldish, his absence escaped discussion.

CHAPTER XX.

"Thou leanest o'er thine infant's couch of pain."

BEFORE long, it became evident that the little May did not thrive in the heated atmosphere of London. She lost much of her playfulness, and exhibited a fretfulness and languor so unusual, that the careful watchfulness of her mother took instant alarm. Fortunately for the peace of her kind heart, Mrs. Vansittart had bidden adieu to Violet before the symptoms of this fresh anxiety had betrayed themselves.

Mrs. Harcourt and her husband tried every means in their power to alleviate that which they considered an unnecessary terror,

but their efforts were unavailing. They found it to be impossible to re-assure Violet or to persuade her to remain longer with them. Without allowing her fears to be allayed, she summoned the best professional skill to her aid. When the opinion given was to the effect that the most beneficial treatment would consist in taking her little one back to her native air, she with feverish haste commenced arrangements for their return to Greyford Hall.

"There was no actual danger," the kind physician had said, "nothing absolutely wrong." But, as he repeated his injunction, that no time should be lost in carrying the invalid back to the purer air of her home, he looked with an additional benevolent gravity at the young widowed mother and her dangerously fair bright-eyed child.

May bore the journey wonderfully well. Lord Marchmont was waiting in the avenue to welcome them, while Mr. and Mrs. Matingley

were nearer the house. All had heard of the illness of May, and they had come, if need should arise, to make themselves serviceable. Their repeated assertion that the invalid looked much better than they had anticipated, considerably relieved Violet.

She had been so completely overwhelmed with nervous fears attendant upon this new trouble, and so anxious to reach home, that she had been unable to dwell, either upon the change in the conduct of Stanley Wyldish, or upon the fact, that she had not seen the lady, who had been recommended to her by a friend of Mrs. Harcourt, to fill the place of companion.

By pre-arrangement, not many hours after she and May had reached Greyford Hall, Miss Firmstone also arrived. Strong-mindedness was stamped on every detail of her appearance,—on her ill-assorted dress,—her thick clumsy boots, and badly arranged hair. Her disdainful repudiation of all notion of fatigue, and

her hard matter-of-fact manner pointed to the same conclusion.

The expression of dismay on the face of Violet as she received her was almost ludicrous, while Stevens announced her with a most decided dash of disapproval in his well-trained voice.

“Oh dear,” ejaculated Violet, when, after having done all that civility required, she rejoined Mrs. Matingley and May, in the privacy of her boudoir. “Oh dear!” she repeated disconsolately. “I wish you had been with me when Miss Firmstone arrived just now. I am sure she must be very good. Those sort of strong-minded looking people always are, I believe. I am afraid she will be too good, and that my little darling and myself will have to hide our diminished heads for very shame before her. She says, ‘that she is never tired, never ill, never requires any rest or refreshment after a journey, and that she never touches afternoon tea. She likes

walking better than riding or driving, and cold weather better than warm.' What will she think of me, I wonder, with my dislike to discomfort, and the variety of my small self-indulgences? And, dear Mrs. Matingley, do you suppose that she will always creak about in heavy boots as though she expected, even in the drawing-room, to find herself ankle deep in mud?"

Mrs. Matingley, good gentle soul, was not a little appalled at this description of the new comer; but she endeavoured to reconcile Violet, by suggesting that, at any rate, she would in all probability prove useful, and that it was not well to judge hastily, or by appearances, since experience continually proved, that externals were not to be trusted as safe indicators of what a person really is. This reasoning was accepted by Violet, with a gentle smile of acquiescence, and all disturbing thoughts respecting Miss Firmstone were quickly forgotten, as she took May

upon her lap, and began to caress her fondly.

“Don’t yer fret, ma’am, if you please,” said our old friend, Susan Carrington, who had a few days subsequently petitioned to see the “young ladies,” as she persisted in calling Violet and May. “Children be soon down ; but they be soon up again. I’ve ’ad a deal of experience in their ways, hasking your pardon, if you please, ma’am, and the fresh air will soon put the roses on the darling’s cheeks again, never you fear, ma’am.”

But the fresh air fanned softly the cheek of the little one, while loving anxious kisses, mingled with the dew of prayer, fell even yet more softly, and still the roses faded. Day by day they became of fainter hue until, even faster, and more sadly than they were dying out from the face of the child, they were assuming an ashen whiteness upon that of the mother.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Our passions always fatal counsel give."

"It is very good of you, Basil, old boy, to have taken the trouble to come down and look after me. But nothing can help me. I am the most unfortunate man out. Things never go straight with me as they do with some fellows, but then I am such a fool. I wish I could leave the country to-morrow. I have bills out against me all over the place, and the harder I try to win money, the worse my abominable luck is," and as he spoke, Stanley Wyldish paced the room impatiently.

"Desperate remedies rarely succeed,"

quietly returned Basil Cranmore. "Dame Fortune is a worldling, and does not often help the necessitous; and as for leaving the country, you are safest, you know, close to a kicking horse."

"Safest, perhaps, Basil, but uncommonly uncomfortable. I would rather go to arm's length of it, and then thrash it, to within an inch of its life. I hate half measures."

Basil Cranmore laughed. "Kill or cure, eh! Wyldish. That is an old notion of yours which has cropped up again."

"And a good many others with it, worse luck for me," Wyldish retorted, moodily. "Why on earth I ever took to 'letting go' that which, while I was 'holding fast,' carried me through many a temptation, I cannot think. I only know that bad has become worse, ever since, and that I am disgusted with myself and everything around me."

"Nonsense," answered Basil, "sit down, and don't grow furious. Leave the past to

take care of itself, and make a better shot for the future."

"Hang the future!" impatiently interrupted Stanley Wyldish. "Marry Inah Dallingcourt in it, I suppose, which is the only probability I have been clever enough to weave into its prospects. I bolted from town, or I believe it would have been half done by this time."

"Better to bolt altogether, I should say, in spite of my former advice, than to marry in your present frame of mind. But it is absurd to keep talking of such alternatives. If what you have told me about Mrs. Vivien be true, upon my word and honour, I think that your first duty is to go and break the news to her yourself."

Stanley Wyldish seated himself, and looked up attentively at Basil Cranmore, as he continued :—

"Your money matters have been in as great a mess before, I suspect, and you have

pulled through it. We can easily stave off the most pressing liabilities. Get leave for a week. It is all bosh about writing to advise her to consult Harcourt, and all that sort of thing. If she must be turned out of her house, surely you are the proper person to break the intelligence to her. You seem to me, to be behaving like a brute, just when an awfully heavy blow is about to fall upon her—and only for some fancied provocation. Mrs. Vivien must naturally look to you for protection at such a time, left in your charge as she has been.”

“Look to me, indeed!” repeated Stanley Wyldish derisively. “Why there are half a dozen at hand ready to succour her. Mrs. Vivien no longer requires my assistance, I assure you. She wanted to get rid of me, of course, or, at least, she would have written.”

Basil Cranmore was perplexed. Men are not so explicit with each other as women are. They do not love to hear, and to tell, as the

softer sex do, every circumstance, no matter how trifling, which may have brought about the desired, or the undesired, result. The broad outline is enough for them, and, in this instance, it was sufficient to indicate that much mischief had not only already been done, but also that greater still might follow.

Under any circumstances, Basil Cranmore strove to persuade his friend to go to Mrs. Vivien. He knew of that which was going on with Inah Dallingcourt, and of the unrest which it had brought. He had, therefore, come to answer by his presence and argument a letter which he had received from Stanley Wyldish.

Their conversation was held in the room of an hotel, close by the quarters of Stanley Wyldish, and was pursued until long past midnight.

"Destroy that letter, old fellow, and try to come back to town with me to-morrow, and then go down as fast as you can to

. Mrs. Vivien," were Basil Cranmore's last words.

And he won the day. Violet had been at home about a fortnight, when Stanley Wyldish arrived at Greyford Hall.

CHAPTER XXII.

"But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token."

THE hall door was opened by an under footman, whose face was strange to Stanley Wyldish, and who, with a look of stupid astonishment, together with some degree of hesitation, ushered him into the empty drawing-room. Although Basil Cranmore had succeeded in persuading him to convey the intelligence, which it was necessary to impart to Violet by speech rather than by letter, there was little of softened feeling in his heart towards her. Long before the con-

versation which led to this result, Stanley Wyldish had been smarting under the unworthy vexation which he had then betrayed. But his thoughts were too chaotic to allow him to define them with anything like distinctness.

The inlet of jealous anger had grown broad and deep. It had overspread the peace of by-gone days, and had hollowed out treacherous pitfalls for the present.

There exists no circumstance, which a jealous nature will not distort and colour, until it harmonizes with the picture drawn by its distempered imagination. Jealousy is a suicidal passion to the happiness of the person who indulges in it, and a murderous one, most probably, to that of another.

The poor benighted African, who prostrates himself before his God of thunder, and, with terrified supplication, implores that the raging storm may cease, has as little chance of being heard, as the voice of common sense amid

the din of contending emotions, which are raised by the whirlwind of jealousy.

The sun of hallowed friendship, or, it may be, of passionate love, is suddenly obscured. The storm-cloud gathers in the horizon, and, as it nears, increases in its sullen blackness. Ere long its vengeful mutterings are heard, and at length its fury breaks forth, and devastates that which perchance cometh back to us "never more."

The demon of jealousy must be thrust back with mighty hand and holy spell, before it dries up the fountain of generosity within our souls, or waves its enchanted scourge of miserable meanness over our judgment.

Stanley Wyldish was, even now, tottering under its grasp. He had shaped his course of action under its dominion. Swayed by its power, he had well-nigh renounced the trust reposed in him by Arundel Vivien, while, deluded by its sophistry, he had forged manacles, from which the furnace of time

would take long to release him. He had allowed a circumstance, so trifling in itself, that it did not contain reality enough to cast even a shadow, to grow, in the hot-bed of his shackled mind, until it became a wide-spreading luxuriance which sapped old influences and sheltered new prejudices.

Alas! so it is, too often. All that may have gone before, or that has proved the purity of those in whom our trust was vested, is blotted out by the plague-spot from which no deliverance is sought. The forms of suffering which it creates are hydra-headed. Mad-denying with its fever at one time, crushing with its agony at another, it rankles so deeply with some, that it cannot be probed, while with others it spreads over the fair surface of life until naught escapes it.

Its venomous fangs caused our hero to plunge headlong into the seething billows of temptation, and to leap into their dangerous

depths, rather than seek for the healing power of explanation. His former devotion to Violet was exchanged for a fierce self-sacrifice, which falsely deemed it heroism, not only to separate himself from her, but to do so without protest.

And more. There dwelt a secret in his soul—a secret which added a double lash to the rod under which he suffered, but would not bend.

Hitherto, the fear of inflicting pain upon the gentle nature of Violet had exercised a strong power over Stanley Wyldish.

He discarded this fear now, and argued to himself that he, and his actions, were alike unimportant to her. Therefore, with the intelligence, which he was about to impart—that she must leave Greyford Hall—he determined to add a revelation which concerned himself.

With this resolve he arrived, when, forgetting that he was unlooked-for, the very for-

mality with which he was ushered into the drawing-room, afforded fresh food for his annoyance.

"Done on purpose, I suppose, to show me my present footing in the house," he said to himself.

"Scarcely necessary," he continued, "from one for whom I have worked my best and hardest. She is happier now, I suppose, and taken up with new friends, while I am thrown to the winds."

Notwithstanding the passionate nature of his soliloquy, however, the silence and the loneliness were becoming oppressive to him.

"Had the servant failed to announce him?" he wondered, "or, could Violet be out?"

He glanced from the window, with the hope that he might see her returning from a ramble in the park or garden. Then he walked across the room, and entered the verandah. There, all looked bright and carefully tended. Its arrangements were as

luxurious, and the flowers as lovely, as usual ; but, somehow, the traces of the presence of Violet were wanting.

In the drawing-room this was more forcibly apparent. The piano was shut, and the music was piled away ; her work-basket was covered ; there was no footstool before her appropriated corner on the sofa, and no scattered books. Stanley Wyldish looked anxiously at the prim, cold formality of everything which met his eye. A chill crept gradually over him, which he tried in vain to shake off. "What could be the matter? Where was Bon-bon?" he asked himself, with a desperate effort for composure.

Again and again his heart throbbed quickly with the fancy that he heard the rustle of Violet's dress, or the pattering of the approaching footsteps of little May. More than once he turned eagerly towards the door, while an anxious longing in his eyes usurped the place of coldness. But the mistaken sounds

died away, and his solitude remained unbroken.

By-and-by, his breath came thick and fast, as the terrible idea darted into his mind that, perhaps Violet was ill. The thought rendered his position unendurable.

"It can hardly be," he mused. "Ill news invariably travels quickly, and, after all, it is not so very long since I wrote to her. She has other visitors, perhaps, or is engaged with May."

He took a periodical from its place, and turned over the leaves, which he found to be uncut. As the crawling of a spider on the wall is sometimes sufficient to alarm the excited ear of an anxious listener, so, in like manner, these unread pages increased his fears.

"Could Violet have gone from home again, or the servant have forgotten that he was there?"

He looked at his watch as he thought this,

and discovered that, despite his impatience, a longer time had elapsed than he supposed. For some time he gazed at the hands as they pointed to the fleeting minutes. At length he rose, and ventured to ring the bell. The summons remained unanswered.

When daylight is around us, there is something appalling in utter and intense silence; and that which now reigned over Greyford Hall was so unusual, that Stanley Wyldish felt as though he were the only breathing creature therein. He bore a stout heart within his breast, but a presentiment of evil curdled the blood in his veins.

The suspense of this long waiting became, at last, more than he could bear.

Opening the door he looked across the spacious hall. There was no one to be seen—not a sound to be heard. He was growing desperate with anxiety, but why he scarcely knew.

“Violet,” he murmured in his terror, and

then rushed up the broad staircase to her boudoir door.

There he paused and listened breathlessly.

Nothing broke the stilness save the faint chirp of a distant bird in some far-off tree.

"Violet," again he murmured, as he knocked softly.

The door yielded to his touch. Too miserably anxious for ceremony, he entered the apartment in which the portière was drawn back, and the door leading into the other room thrown open.

At first his bewildered eye failed to comprehend the scene before him. A group of frightened weeping domestics were huddled together.

He vaguely noticed their blanched faces, as they looked towards him, and the chill of anxiety which he had endured, froze into an icy despair as he beheld, stretched on a bed, in the marble coldness of death, the

little May, and by her side, with one arm thrown around her, Violet, as still, and apparently as lifeless, as her child.

Susanne, blinded by tears, was applying what restoratives she could. Perceiving Stanley Wyldish, she approached him, and sobbed hoarsely :

“Dead, sir,—Miss May,—quite suddenly. Miss Firmstone has gone for Mrs. Matingley, and Stevens to send a telegram for you. My mistress, sir,—for pity’s sake lift her away—I have tried, but cannot move her.”

Once before, as Stanley Wyldish had stood in that same chamber, he had seen the dim light fall softly over the face of one just gone from earth.

Once before he had gently lifted the same sorrow-stricken, insensible being, whom Susanne now implored him to move, from the dead form of a fondly loved one.

For a second he bent his knee reverently by the couch upon which rested the body

from which the young and pure spirit of May had so recently flown ; and then he steadied his trembling arm, and removed the mother from her lifeless little one. He carried her gently to a sofa in the adjoining room, and left her to the care of Mrs. Matingley and Miss Firmstone.

Where, now, were all the false and unfounded suspicions, in which he had so closely wrapped his better nature. Gone ! with a self-reproach, second only in the intensity of its pain to that of their imagined reality.

That night there gleamed, until daybreak, lights from the windows of two rooms in Greyford Hall. In both chambers there were solitary watchers—in both were lonely mourners wrestling with the sorrow of the hours. From the agonized heart of the kneeling figure of one, there rose up the incense of prayer and faith, as she cried to Him, through Whom, even in that dark hour,

she felt herself to be not all alone. Long were her clasped hands uplifted in earnest supplication, while from time to time, with faltering steps, she crept to gaze upon the closed eyes and rigid figure of the treasure, which had been lent to her for so short a time. At length her delicate frame could bear no more, and, as daylight dawned, God sent her sleep.

But from where the other lights shone out in the gloomy exterior of the house, there ascended the cry of a strong man, who wildly heaped curses and reproaches upon himself. The bright stars twinkled in the heavens as the hours glided away, and the night-breeze played gently against the window panes ; but he still sat on, with folded arms and moody brow.

“My darling,” were the words which at last rang through the silent room, “and I would have heaped another misery upon you in that cruel letter of mine, but for Cranmore.

You are suffering—and I may not go to you.

“‘Woe to the traitor who breaks a promise,’ you told me long ago—woe, indeed. The curse of a sullied faith is on me,—I may not tell you of my love.”

The sentences were incoherent, but they spoke of the sorrowful longing, the bitter awakening, and passionate love, which were filling the heart and soul of Stanley Wyldish.

Daylight came, but no slumber to him. With the first faint streak of dawn he passed stealthily from the house.

The glistening dewdrops fell unnoticed under his impatient footstep, but as the cool morning air swept over his uncovered head, and refreshed his weary eyes, new resolution and courage arose within him. With revived strength he sought to smite

“—the chord of self;”

that so he might prove a comforter to Violet in the time which was coming for them both.

The little May was buried, and another name would soon be carved on the surface of the marble, which marked the resting-place of Arundel Vivien.

Violet had now no baby ear in which to whisper of papa, and papa's home.

The tramp of slowly moving horses' feet and the heavy rumble of carriages had ceased in the avenue which led to Greyford Hall, and all that appertains to that dire state, considered necessary for the transmission of an idolized form from its home of life, to its home of death, was over.

None had seen Violet since she laid her wreath of lilies upon the coffin, which hid her sweet May blossom from her gaze.

Stanley Wyldish hovered anxiously near her boudoir door—mourning bitterly all the while, for Violet, for little May, for Arundel, and for himself.

"Has Mrs. Vivien eaten anything," he inquired of Mrs. Matingley, who was the first person to issue from the room.

"Nothing. I cannot persuade her to do so," she replied, her anxiety nearly equalling his own.

"May I bring her this morsel and try if it will tempt her?" he continued.

"Do," she answered sadly, "it is growing late, and until now, she has partaken of nothing to sustain her."

"You must eat this, Mrs. Vivien," he commenced, when Mrs. Matingley had conducted him to her side. "I must insist," he went on with a faint attempt at raillery in his voice.

Violet looked listlessly at him. There were no tears in her sadly strained eyes, and her colourless face was calm, as though she had nerved herself for endurance.

It was more agonizing for him than he had imagined, to see her thus. He longed to take her in his arms, and shelter her from

some of the keenness of the blast of grief now beating around her. It was so hard to keep back the love, which pity was increasing every instant.

But, unconsciously, she helped him to preserve his self-command. She was so far away from him in spirit, as she sat there pale and still, and so unconscious in her suffering of everything around her, that the sacredness of her sorrow stole insensibly over, and calmed him.

He endeavoured to persuade her to consent to take some rest and nourishment. At last, he pleaded, "If you do not eat something, you will die."

She raised her wan face, while an eager ray of hope lighted her eyes, heavy with sorrow, as she said: "Then I should see Arundel and May."

The hand of Stanley Wyldish, which still held the proffered nourishment before her, shook violently as he replied, with

as much calmness as he could : " Yes ! yes ! but now, you know, they would like you to keep strong and well."

And then, tried as he had been, throughout the day, by the variety of conflicting emotions which possessed him, he could no longer trust himself in her presence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again."

STANLEY WYLDISH was finding the school of adversity to be, in very truth, a hard one.—The lessons of patience, which the succeeding week brought him, were essentially severe to his impetuous disposition. He spent as large a portion of time as he possibly could under the roof of Greyford Hall; but while there, with all his strength of limb and force of will, he was constrained to sit still and do nothing. The inaction was a sore trial to him. There was little variation in the daily routine. Sometimes Violet was able to see him for a short time towards evening, but still

oftener he had no interview with her at all. There was a sad hush pervading every part of the house. The baby voice was missing, and, at times, the melancholy was almost insupportable to him.

Mrs. Matingley had temporarily taken up her abode at Greyford Hall. But to Stanley Wyldish, in his agitated frame of mind, her society was scarcely less irksome than solitude. On the other hand, he regarded Miss Firmstone with a stolid curiosity, as if some newly discovered specimen of animal creation had been unexpectedly brought before his notice.

Julia Firmstone was rigid and uncompromising in the discharge of her duties. She was the daughter of a stock-broker, who had once been wealthy, and she had passed her youth in one of the would-be aristocratic suburbs of London.

The reputed wealth of her father, together with their pink and white cheeks,

and second-rate fashionable airs, had gained husbands for her sisters after their own desire and standing, and they were now mistresses of establishments fashioned after the pattern of their paternal home, which they had quitted.

Long before her girlhood had passed, and her father's wealth had vanished, Julia Firmstone had been sagacious enough to discover, that the pretentious habits of her family were alien to those of real refinement and gentle birth. She had realized that the overbearing sufficiency, which is the offspring of vacant minds, and of an undue estimation of pounds, shillings and pence, and which is nurtured by the possession of a badly appointed carriage, a gaudily furnished house, and modern plate, kept them, as far as one pole is from the other, from the society which they aped, while it only served as a subject for diversion to many in their own social scale, not like-minded with themselves.

After Mr. Firmstone's means had become

reduced, she supported herself, preferring independence to a sojourn with either of her married sisters.

She prided herself upon the moral courage which had instigated this mode of life to her, while the experience which she drew from it considerably flattered the clear-sightedness of her former judgment.

Poor Julia Firmstone! To be ever on the defensive, armed at every point against all surroundings, does not, it would seem, enhance the beauty of feminine virtues. Her early dread, of assuming with her relatives an appearance of more importance than was her due, her fear now of being underrated had produced a harshness of manner by no means attractive.

Many more grievous defects than hers are mended, if not cured, by fellow-feeling and gentle influences; but the exterior which she presented was too cold and self-sustained to invite either.

She was a totally novel illustration of her sex to Stanley Wyldish, and one which, at any other time, would have afforded him considerable amusement. It was not often that he entered into conversation with her. Whenever he did, he became conscious that she had somehow grazed his sensitiveness with a sort of mental brick-dust, which was by no means agreeable.

The application, however, was skilfully, and apparently unintentionally, inserted into the pores of his self-consciousness. In fact, Julia Firmstone, by the activity of her mind and body, rubbed up all with whom she came in contact.

It had not been thought advisable to withhold from her the knowledge of the additional trial which, sooner or later, must be revealed to Violet. Indeed, it would have been difficult to do so any longer, since the unpleasant task of retrenchment had at length to be commenced without loss of time. Each

one, as it was made, was an especial anxiety to Stanley Wyldish. He dreaded so much the questionings which might arise from Violet.

Hitherto, she had acquiesced in his suggestions with little or no expression of interest. Now, however, the difficult task of disposing of the inmates of the stable, without arousing her to a full sense of that which was impending, was before him.

In despair, he was one day driven to the forlorn hope of appealing to Julia Firmstone, hoping that, even from her, he might gain some helpful advice.

He longed for Mrs. Vansittart at every turn, with her loving heart and quick suggestive tact.

The result of his consultation was a signal failure. She continued her needlework with unabated industry, while he addressed her, without pausing either to look at him, or to betray an interest in her

employment, by any of those affectionate pats, coaxing smoothings, and examinations, which ordinarily vary the monotony of busy fingers similarly employed, and make us love to watch them.

She evidently took a stern view of the laws of progression, and allowed her needle no pleasant loiterings by the way.

She retained the erect position of her angular figure, while her stiff morning dress crackled in its folds, as each stitch was left with precision in its destined place.

"You had better tell Mrs. Vivien the truth plainly," she jerked out, in reply, when Stanley Wyldish had imparted his perplexity to her. "She will understand that the carriages and horses can be sold better under your superintendence than when you are away. It is necessary, therefore it must be done. Disagreeable things cannot be made agreeable, and the more disagreeable they are, the more right they generally are,

and consequently I think the better for people. I have a contempt for those weak-minded individuals, who take chloroform to avoid feeling the pain of having their teeth extracted, and who have their pills silvered, that they may not taste what they hope will do them good."

Stanley Wyldish made no more attempts at fraternization with the holder of a creed so foreign to himself, and he shuddered at the thought of Violet coming into contact with her, as one shudders at the thought of a little child being exposed to hard words and cruel blows.

The death of little May, and the terrible circumstances of his arrival, so different from all that his imagination had conceived, induced a revulsion of feeling in him easy to be understood.

He could scarcely believe that, only so short a while back, he had proposed to him-

self to keep aloof from Violet, at the time of her departure from her home.

The retrospection which he had forced from himself on former occasions was too heavily laden now to be driven back.

It stood out defiantly and would not be repulsed.

He was very wretched. All are so who, in "letting go" that which they know to be right, endeavour to compromise the distance between its barriers and the wide expanse of wrong, or who, in "holding fast" that which their conscience condemns, would efface the boundary line which separates evil from all that is true and pure. He looked mournfully and with sore contempt upon the miserable wreck which he had made of his resolution, but there was no recklessness in his self-dissatisfaction.

The fair glittering sails which had flaunted so gaily and proudly once, drooped heavily

now, and Stanley Wyldish looked vainly for a beacon whereby to steer his course.

The world of his happiness circled around Violet; but, enshrined as she was upon the loftiest pinnacle of his purest love, he knew not how to hope to share that world with her.

Therefore, he grappled manfully for self-command to abide by the consequences of his folly, and to encompass her with the devotion of an untold love.

Everything around him, as he passed the lonely hours, seemed to bear a glance of reproach.

The voice and footstep of Arundel would still seem to linger amid the silent rooms, and Violet to hover at her husband's side, with gay and happy laughter, while he was once again their guest, full of high resolutions and plans for a better and more useful life.

They had been so active, bright, and

healthy in their goodness, that their influence was of little wonder.

He recalled his many light-hearted comings to and fro, with the ever-ready welcome which awaited him ; and, in his self-abasement, it almost appeared to him that he had failed in faithfulness to the trust reposed in him by his friend.

It was not so, in fact—that he well knew. He remembered with thankfulness that, through all his passionate misconception, his energy had never slackened in its attempts to avert the stroke which was about to fall upon Violet ; but he could not forgive himself for the silence which had prevented him from being made acquainted with the illness of May, and which had consequently kept him in ignorance until it was too late.

The hours and days slipped away, while he dreaded, but yet longed, to make the sad revelation to Violet.

At last it was over. She listened atten-

tively, and with perfect composure, to the few sentences which he could only with difficulty articulate, while her calmness astonished him.

Happily, there are not many among us who know, by sad experience, how the nature of one grief may be so crushing, that, having uprooted all our joy, and turned into sorrow the very current of our lives, it swallows up and absorbs all lesser ones.

Even Stanley Wyldish, with all his tenderness for Violet, failed to understand this.

The terrible loss of her husband and child, around whom her deepest affections were entwined, engrossed her so completely that the intelligence with regard to that of property, house, and land fell lightly upon her ear.

There was more scope for activity, now that this sad removal could be openly spoken of. Violet had seen Lord Marchmont, and had acquiesced in the desire of Lady March-

mont that she should go first to them, after leaving Greyford Hall.

The ordeal was becoming fiercer and fiercer for Stanley Wyldish.

Each day, Violet and he dismantled some home-corner, too dearly-loved for stranger hands to touch or occupy. A strength, on which he had not learned to rest, upheld Violet, but the patient, weary sadness of her every movement overwhelmed him with grief.

He guarded her as much as possible from the many painful leavetakings, which were solicited by rich and poor ; but instances of the latter he often found to be unavoidable.

" I think Arundel would wish it," was her touching plaint of entreaty.

Susan Carrington, therefore, with her husband, and many another, shook her thin, white hand respectfully, and, with tears in their honest eyes, left, praying that she might soon be restored to them again.

Violet Vivien saw only in Stanley Wyldish the friend whom her husband had loved and trusted beyond all others.

She recognized in him one who had taken care of her, and of her little May, in their need, and who would now protect her in her still greater adversity.

She knew nothing of the suffering which had crept over him—nothing of his recent bitterness and jealousy. All his unfounded anger, together with his present penitence, were unknown to her. There was no trace of suspicion in her mind that aught of speck or flaw could be found in any action of his.

The conflict, which had lately raged over him with such violence, had left her untouched, and it followed quite naturally to her, from his former kindness, that he should be with her, to aid her, at a time like the present.

The last day of her residence in her old

home was nearly over. Stanley Wyldish, leaving his solitary dinner untouched, sat alone. Lord Marchmont had been with him for some hours during the day, but he had preferred to be left to himself in the evening.

There is something inexpressibly forlorn and dreary in the aspect of a house, when it is prepared for the departure of those who have thrown over it the charm of their presence, and who have consecrated it to us by their influence.

In this particular instance, the arrangements which were now completed were intensely painful to Stanley Wyldish. Our capabilities, however, for experiencing emotions, of whatever kind, are finite. They jostle together and wrestle over us, but that which is dearest to us, and the deepest set in our hearts, will assume the sway. We may strive to gather up more sugar-plums than our hands can hold, but we are forced to scatter even as we gather.

In like manner as one delight flows into our bosoms and becomes supreme, a former rapture floats away. So with grief.

Violet, as we know, calmly listened in the woe of her bereavements to the information that further desolation awaited her, and now Stanley Wyldish lost sight of the outward tokens of sorrow past, and of sorrow to come, in his distress at the thought of how soon he would be far from Violet.

Greyford Hall was shortly to pass into other hands. Merriment and laughter would doubtless, ere long, resound again within its walls, and happy busy life succeed to the sadness and stillness which had brooded over it of late.

There is an awe, mingled with dread, cast over our misery by the word *last*. The fair girl who is to be made a bride on the morrow, although her heart be dancing in the light of another's love, trembles, and her young cheek pales, with the thought that the last day to

be passed by her in the home of her childhood is gliding away.

The *last* kiss—the *last* glimpse of those we love—the *last* kindly word—each and all consummate their agony by those four letters. Heart and brain are numbed by them to the consciousness of all else, and this last evening clamorously asserted its sorrow over Stanley Wyldish.

Throughout the day the gloom of the weather had been in unison with his feelings. Heavy thunder had continued almost incessantly—now rolling far away and moaning in the distance, as though its fury were expending itself in dying groans, and then crashing overhead with deafening peals.

But as he looked forth at eve upon the familiar landscape around him, the thunder had ceased its roar, the wind had ceased its wailing, and the rain from its deluging torrents.

He wandered moodily from room to room,

and then passed to the verandah. The hour was rapidly approaching when he must relinquish Violet to the charge of Lady Marchmont, and the anguish of the coming parting from her completely unnerved him.

The motives which, hitherto, had been powerful enough to enforce his silence, so gave way before the fear of separation, that he was ready, in his wretchedness, to consider they had been overstrained.

The baying of the dogs belonging to the place, more than once disturbed his reverie, but upon inquiry, there appeared to be no cause for their restlessness. Nevertheless, a stealthy footstep was moving amid the shrubbery close by.

The shadows of evening deepened, and the face of nature gradually darkened, but before surrounding objects became invisible, a tall figure stole from under the cedar-tree, which has been already described, and keeping within the shadow of the house, moved past

it, and paused before the end of the verandah. Looking cautiously in, a half-audibly muttered execration betrayed that the presence of Stanley Wyldish had been detected.

An exotic in profuse bloom which covered the glass, completely screened the form of the intruder from the possibility of being observed from within.

But although thus hidden, the hate which a pair of keen piercing eyes levelled at Stanley Wyldish from between the flowers of the plant, had power to arouse him from his meditation. Glancing up quickly, with an unaccountable sensation of uneasiness, he encountered their cold glitter.

He strode hastily across the verandah, and the fair blossoms fell in showers, as he hurriedly pushed them aside. But swiftly as he had moved to where they rested, the rapidity with which the figure had glided away was even swifter.

There was nothing to be seen. The glass

doors were locked as well as closed, and resisted his impatient attempt to open them. With an angry exclamation at his eager haste being thus foiled, he turned away, and throwing up one of the windows in the adjacent drawing-room, sprang from it. It was a few feet only from the ground, and he gained the open air without further loss of time. But his promptitude was unavailing, and after searching for some time, he returned to the house.

The event had considerably disturbed him. However, he determined to mention it neither to Mrs. Matingley and Miss Firmstone, nor to the servants, in case an alarm should be raised which might reach Violet. He resumed his former position, therefore, without communicating the occurrence to any one.

But in spite of his endeavour to shake off their impression, the eyes haunted him, until each plant appeared imbued with life, and myriads of hideous, stony faces to be glaring

at him. He felt as if an actual transformation scene was going on around him, and himself to be the victim of some horrible enchantment.

Resolved to keep his watch, however, he again left the house, and whistling an old and faithful bull-terrier of his own to his side, returned with him, and re-seated himself. The dog crouched by the side of his master, and with this companionship, Stanley Wyldish established himself on guard.

But, before long, the sound of a light footstep sent the blood surging through his veins with the wild hope that it might be Violet. It was only Susanne, however, who was seeking for him.

“Will you kindly come to Mrs. Vivien, sir?” she asked. “She is crying so violently, that we do not know what to do for her. She has been sobbing ever since she put away Miss May’s garden hat. It was left by mistake in the side hall, and unfortunately

she noticed the ribbon, and asked for it immediately."

He needed no further entreaty. Before Susanne had finished speaking, he was hastening to Violet.

END OF VOL. I.









